ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

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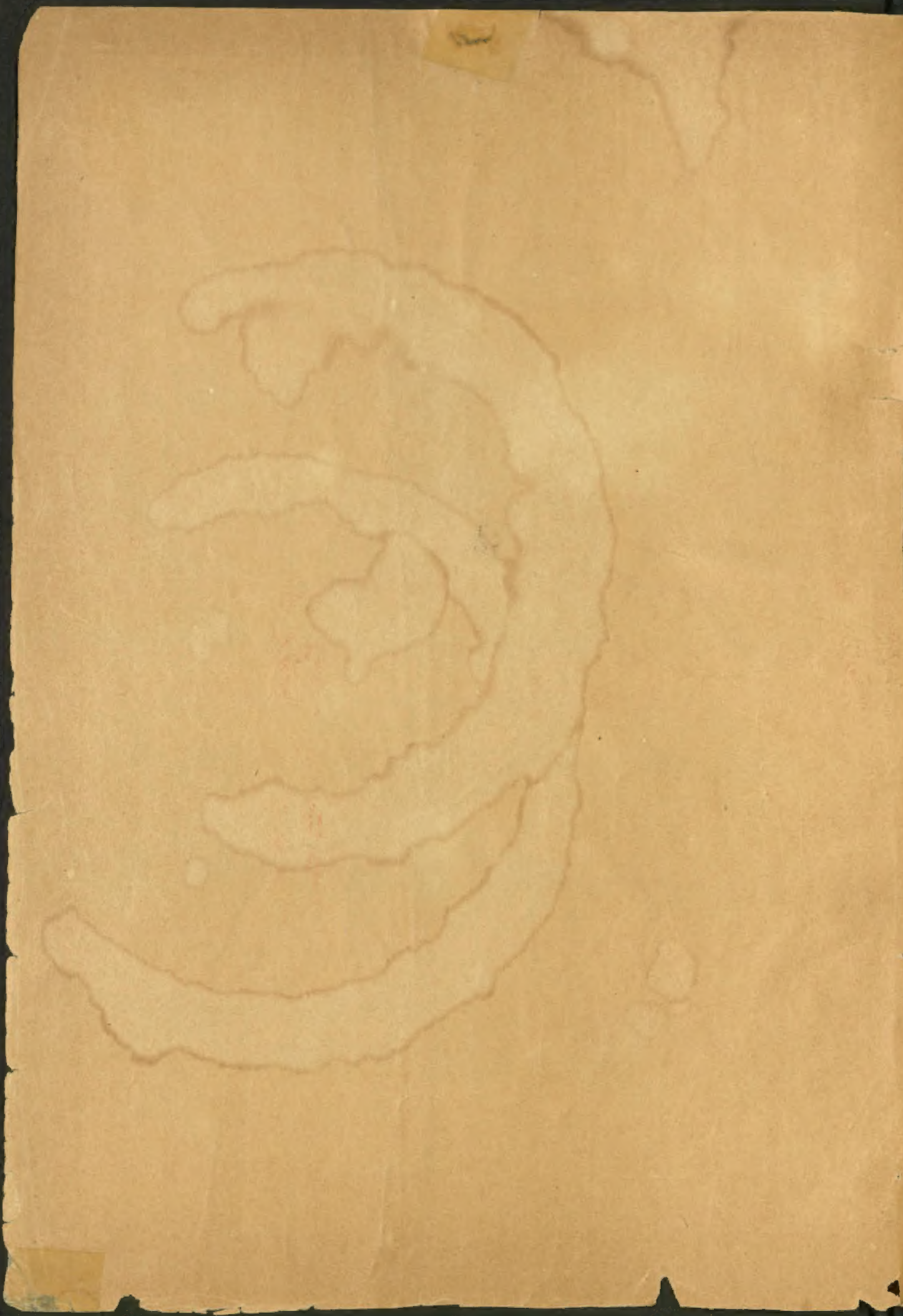
No. 108 NEW YORK, MAY 12, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

KING OF THE WILD WEST'S CAMPAIGN

or How Stella won the Victory

"I am not much of a speech maker," said Stella. "But I want to say that Ted Strong was fairly elected, and these revolvers are here to support him."



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King of the Wild West's Campaign;

OR

HOW STELLA WON THE VICTORY.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

TED AS MARSHAL OF GONZALES.

The corral of Mr. Walter Graham's sheep ranch, the "Los Gatos," a short distance south of Gonzales, Valencia County, New Mexico, held a nondescript bunch of cattle which had been gathered in the neighborhood.

Seated upon a pony to one side of the corral chute, her scarlet bolero jacket, trimmed with gold bullion, flashing in the bright sunlight, was Stella Fosdick, Mr. Graham's niece.

A hundred yards, away, and, galloping toward her, gathering up his rope as he approached, was Ted Strong, King of the Wild West and leader of the young rough riders.

Standing on the top rail of the chute, holding a watch in his hand, was Bud Morgan.

"Ted," shouted he, "you beat her by a minute."

"Let out another one," cried the girl to Ben Tremont, Kit Summers, and Clay Whipple, who were inside cutting out the cattle, "and I'll establish a new record for him."

But at that moment Bud Morgan, happening to glance in the direction of Gonzales, shouted:

"Look at ther people! Look at ther people headed this way."

They turned and gazed in the direction of the town.

A great procession was approaching. There were men in carriages, on horseback, and some on foot.

"I wonder what's the matter," said Stella. "When uncle went to town this morning, he never said anything about going to bring out a lot of people."

"Looks ter me," said Bud, "like a picnic er a lynchin' bee."

"Maybe they are coming to get you, Bud," continued the girl. "Did you do anything in town last night that you ought to be hung for?"

Before Bud could reply the procession stopped in front of the ranch-house. The people dismounted and went in, and a few minutes later Mr. Graham appeared at the rear of the house, and, using his hands as a megaphone, shouted at the top of his voice:

"Oh, Ted! Come up here, please. Some people from town to see you."

"Oh, it's you they're after," laughed the girl, as they galloped in the direction of the house.

When they reached Mr. Graham, he asked:

"What in the world were you doing down at the corral?"

"Why," laughed Stella, as she dismounted, "the boys have gathered all the cattle they could find in this neigh-

borhood and we were practising roping. Ted and the boys are talking of attending the Texas State roping contest, and I want to go, too, if aunt will agree to come along. With a little more practise, I think I can beat Ted, and win a prize, sure."

"Where did you find enough cattle for roping purposes?" asked Mr. Graham, smiling.

"I guess we've got some of your milk cows in the corral," laughed Stella.

"I expect that's the truth," said her uncle. "Nice way to treat a milk cow."

"Well," protested the girl, "we had to have something to practise on. You can't learn much, roping sheep."

Mr. Graham laughed.

"I'll send down to Ike Maggart's ranch to-morrow for a bunch of longhorns for you to practise on," said he, and then turning to Ted, he added: "There's a delegation of the best people of Gonzales inside, waiting to see you."

"What have I done?" asked the King of the Wild West.

"Nothing serious," laughed Mr. Graham. "I suggested that they come out and have a talk with you, but please come inside and hear what they have to say."

Ted was introduced to the Reverend William Gordon, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Gonzales; to Luther Cash, of Cash & Gravely, the leading outfitting establishment in town; to Alonzo West, grocer; to Dan Gott, hardware dealer, and to a score of other Gonzales business men.

"Mr. Strong," said the minister, "we come to you with an unusual proposition. It may seem like asking a great deal of you, but then we have all heard of your deeds of daring in behalf of people in distress, your readiness to uphold law and order, and we are in a position to appeal to you for assistance. We have neither law nor order, and we ask that you accept the nomination for city marshal of Gonzales on a citizens' ticket and aid us in driving from our midst this lawless element which has been riding rough shod over this community for many years."

"But——" began the King of the Wild West.

"Permit us to lay the facts before you," interposed Mr. Cash, "before you make up your mind. Mancos Jim, the present city marshal, is the tool of the gamblers, the saloon-keepers, and a reckless gang of cattlemen who are trying to drive the sheepmen out of the country."

"Yes," said Mr. Graham, "it is dangerous for a man engaged in the sheep business to appear in Gonzales in the daytime. When these cattlemen feel in the mood they ride into town and shoot up the place, and the marshal never bothers them. They have repeatedly threatened to take my life."

"Last winter," said the minister, "a Boston man came to town, looking for an opportunity to invest some money. He did not patronize the saloons and gambling-houses, and the lawless element decided to give him a scare. So that night the town was captured by the cowboys and the hotel where the Boston man was stopping was riddled with bullets. He fled when the shooting started, wandered outside of town, got lost, and, it being a very cold night, froze to death before morning. Nothing was ever done to punish the men who frightened him."

"But why have you not taken steps before now to overthrow this gang?" asked Ted.

"We have," said Mr. West, the grocer, "and what has been the result? Our business houses have been riddled with bullets, and we have been told to keep quiet, or leave town."

"But what show have you now of winning?" continued the King of the Wild West.

"A fairly good one," replied the minister. "While the law-abiding people of Gonzales are in the minority, circumstances this year offer them a chance to get the upper hand, if they put an independent ticket in the field."

"How does that happen?" asked Ted.

"Well," continued the minister, "the Republicans have renominated Mancos Jim and the Democrats have put up a man called 'Big Aztec.' Both men are the tools of the gamblers and the saloon-keepers, and should either be elected the town will not advance one step in the direction of law and order. Mancos Jim and Big Aztec are bitter enemies, and as both have a lot of friends, they will divide the lawless vote. Therefore, if we put forth a ticket our nominee will have as good a chance of being elected as either Big Aztec or Mancos Jim."

"I see," replied Ted, "but why don't you nominate one of your own number. For instance, Mr. Cash, Mr. West, or Mr. Gott. I should think they would have a better show of being elected than myself."

"I have been expecting you to raise that point," said the minister. "Fact of the matter is, that it would be very unwise for either of the men you have mentioned to take the nomination. If it became known this afternoon that Mr. Cash was going to run, his large outfitting establishment would probably be a heap of ashes in the morning. So, you see, we are in a peculiar position. We cannot help ourselves without sustaining great financial loss."

"Ted," said Mr. Graham, at this point, "these men are my friends. When we discussed to-day the advisability of placing an independent ticket in the field, I suggested that you ought to be offered the nomination. I am satisfied that you are the only man who can bring us relief. I believe we can elect you. You and the boys are looking for adventure, you are going to be here for some time, and right now you have a chance to save a town and add a new feather to your cap."

"We believe that you can lead us to victory and good government," said the minister warmly.

"But," protested the King of the Wild West, "if I should take the nomination, what is there to prevent the gang coming out here and wreaking vengeance upon Mr. Graham, my friend?"

"Ther young rough riders, an' ther King of the Wild West," said Bud Morgan, stepping to Ted's side.

"Take the nomination, Ted Strong," said Stella, entering the room. "I will do all I can to help you into the office."

"An' ther young rough riders'll stick ter you ter ther finish," said Bud, and the people cheered.

"Gentlemen," said Ted, "there seems to be no way open for me to escape. I'll accept the nomination."

Instantly the men pressed forward to shake hands with him.

"But," he continued, "I will take it only on one condition."

He paused until Mr. Graham asked: "And what is that condition?"

"That I'll be permitted to resign," pursued Ted, "as soon as I have driven out the gang of outlaws; that is, of course," he added, "in case I get elected."

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Graham, turning to the visitors in the room, "since you have been selected by the respectable, law-abiding people of Gonzales to find a man to run for marshal on an independent ticket, and since you have heard what the King of the Wild West says, I suggest that it is not necessary for you to go back to town to hold your convention. Hold it right here in my parlor, where the lawless gang will not have a chance to molest you."

His suggestion was followed, and in thirty minutes Ted Strong had been nominated for marshal of Gonzales, he had made a speech of acceptance, and the delegates had gone back to town to spread the news.

"Well," said Mr. Graham, rejoining Ted and the boys after escorting the Gonzales delegation out to their horses and carriages, "that was done in a hurry."

"Yes," replied Ted, "but the difficult part of the whole matter is to come yet. What kind of a campaign do you suggest?"

"Our aim should be to keep Mancos Jim and Big Aztec pitted against one another, while we gather to our ranks a few more friends. And we'll have to watch both sides closely or they'll stuff the ballot-box the day of election. There'll be a lot of things to do from now on."

"But what's our next move, from your point of view?"

"Saddle our ponies and go to town this evening and call on Mancos Jim and Big Aztec."

"Liable to be any trouble?" asked Ben Tremont.

"Be sure and take your weapons," replied Mr. Graham, "for in this part of the country you never can tell when something is going to break loose."

CHAPTER II.

BIG AZTEC'S SHREWD PLAN.

Besides being the city marshal of Gonzales, Mancos Jim was the proprietor of the White Elephant Saloon and boarding-house, and he was standing on the sidewalk in front of his place of business, talking to a number of gamblers and bartenders, when Mr. Graham, Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, and the young rough riders rode into town that evening.

Ted saw one of the men nod his head in their direction, and Mancos Jim turned round and stared at them for a few minutes, as though debating on their identity. Then he left his companions and approached them, smiling and holding out his hand.

The King of the Wild West, who had seen him often since the young rough riders had been stopping at the Los Gatos Ranch, watched him intently as he came forward. Ted could not help it, and he never saw the man that he did not have a creepy sensation. It was not that he was afraid of him.

There was something strange about Mancos Jim, something which made you never forget him after you had seen him once. His beard was very black and short and of the style called imperial. His hair was also black, curly, and stringy, reaching to his shoulders. There was a constant flush on his cheeks, and his features, in a general way, expressed considerable strength.

"Howdy," said he; "if I'm not mistaken, you're the young man nominated this day to give Big Aztec and me a run for our money?"

"That's who he is, Jim," said Mr. Graham.

"Well, you're up against a hard proposition, young fellow; that is, if you're in earnest. If you're just in the race to have your eye-teeth cut and see how it's done, why, that's different."

"I'm in this race to win," said the King of the Wild West.

Mancos Jim laughed.

"The deuce you say!" he exclaimed. "You've got a heap of nerve. Come on in and take something," he added, turning in the direction of his saloon.

"I never drink," said Ted.

"If elected," and Mancos Jim smiled, "what's going to be your policy?"

"Clean up the town."

"Run the gamblers out?"

"You bet! And close up most of the saloons."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea. We've got too many saloons for the size of the town. If some of them were closed up, the others would make more money, and so could afford to sell better whisky."

Just at that moment two pistol-shots were fired in a restaurant across the street, and a moment later two hatless men rushed out of the place.

Mancos Jim, Mr. Graham, and the boys ran across to see what was the matter, while Ted remained to see where the two fleeing men took refuge. Presently the marshal returned.

"What was the matter?" inquired the King of the Wild West.

"Nothing much," laughed Mancos Jim. "Two of Asa Jump's cow-punchers went into the restaurant to eat a snack, and they fell out with the waiter, who is as fresh as new paint, morning, evening, or night. Well, they took a couple of shots at him, but as they were full, their aim was bad, and they did no harm. Where did they go?"

"They're over in your saloon now," replied Ted. "Going to arrest them?"

"What's the use? When they get another drink or so they'll be as harmless as if they were in jail. Then they'll not be able to hit the side of a barn."

"What's that you're fastening to the side of your hotel beneath the second-story window?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Oh! that? Why, that's a speaker's platform. Big Aztec made me build that. Look across the street."

They did so, and beneath the second-story window of the Last Chance gambling-hall was a similar platform.

"That's Big Aztec's," continued Mancos Jim, grinning. "He built that so he could step out and make political speeches when the street looked crowded. He orates from that platform now regularly about three in the afternoon. I had to build one so that I could keep up with him."

"Do you take turn about, speaking?" asked Ted.

"No, sir. When I hear Big Aztec shooting off his bazoo, I ascend to my platform and follow suit, giving them my side of the case. We've had some lively debates already. There ain't been any shots fired yet, but Big Aztec is hot-headed, and the first time he gets personal, trouble's going to break out of the corral, sure."

Turning to Ted, Mancos Jim continued, with a broad grin: "You better move into town, hire yourself a hall, build a platform under the second-story window, and throw your voice into the campaign."

"I'd rather stand around and watch you and he," laughed Ted.

"I'd advise you not to get in line between us when we're orating, for I'm expecting him to start something soon, and I don't want anything in the way to hinder me when that joyful period arrives."

"You don't seem to like Big Aztec," suggested Mr. Graham.

"I don't," replied Mancos Jim. "He's a bad man. He ought to be run out of town. I was here first, and things were moving along nicely until he blew in. Of course you're running against me, Mr. Strong, but I am marshal of Gonzales now, and I ask it as a favor that you let me know if Big Aztec so much as crooks his finger at you. If you want to do me a favor which I'll never forget, pick a fuss with him while I'm around, and I'll see that you're treated white."

"I am glad that one of my opponents has taken a liking to me and is going to look after my safety."

Ted turned and winked at Mr. Graham and the boys, and Mancos Jim's watchful eyes caught him in the act.

"Now, see here," said he, with a vigorous toss of the head, "there's no deception about me. I'm open and aboveboard. I say what I mean and mean what I say."

"In other words," continued Ted, "you're looking for a chance to put Big Aztec out of the business of running for city marshal."

"He's heap bad medicine. Now, you and me could have a nice, orderly campaign, if he was out of the way."

"Where did Big Aztec come from?"

"Nowhere in particular. He hasn't been allowed to stay in any one spot long enough to have a home. And Big Aztec isn't his right name. He's changed his name so often since he's been on the move that I don't suppose he can recollect the one he started out with."

"How long has he been here?"

"Bummed his way in here last winter on a freight. He was dirty, ragged, had no money, and when the boys asked for his name, he said: 'Call me anything you like.' They gave him the nickname of Big Aztec, and now you see what he's like—all swelled up with pride and the notion that he owns this town. Now, I've been here three years. The boys liked my style from the start, and I've been marshal ever since."

Asa Jump's cowboys beginning to talk in loud, angry tones in the White Elephant Saloon, Mancos Jim excused himself, saying: "I've got to go in and throw them lads out, for they're liable to get to shooting and bust the mirror behind the bar. Make yourself at home. See you later."

"Well," said Mr. Graham, "Mancos Jim's not going to bother you as long as you do not get in his way. Let's go over and see Big Aztec. Believe that's him standing in the doorway of the Last Chance. Yes, it is," he added, as they crossed the street.

Big Aztec was a large man. He always kept his hair cropped short, and he had a long, dark, drooping mustache. According to Mr. Graham, people said that he was always smiling, even when he was in a quarrel, and that he went into a fight with a grin on his face.

"A dangerous man," whispered Mr. Graham, "for you never can tell when he is angry or pleased, and so you never know when he is going to start a racket."

Big Aztec was intently gazing across the street at the White Elephant Saloon, and did not appear to notice the boys until they were within a few feet of him. Then he turned and smiled upon them.

"Why, I'm glad to see you, Mr. Graham," said he, shaking hands. "And Mr. Strong, let me congratulate you upon your nomination for marshal. Out to get acquainted?"

"Thought I'd look around awhile," replied Ted.

"Rather bad evening to see Gonzales," continued Big Aztec. "Evening's started a little rough. The boys have begun rather early to shoot. Looks like it would be a good deal rougher before morning. Is the marshal going to pinch Jump's cow-punchers?"

Ted, realizing that Big Aztec had probably been watching them during their entire interview with Mancos Jim, and that he had better be very careful about what he said, replied:

"He went inside to see what the fuss was about."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, come inside and see my place; but wait a moment," he added, when they started to follow him. Poking his head through the door, he shouted: "Hey, Oscar?"

A short, heavy-set man came out, and Big Aztec said: "Keep a sharp lookout, and call me if anything happens."

They passed inside, and the boys saw a sight which they had often seen in frontier towns. The hall was crowded with men engaged in playing roulette, faro-bank, and stud poker.

"I've got a good place," continued Big Aztec. "Only house in town where there isn't any betting limit. Everybody knows that if there isn't room on my tables for them to stack up their money, that I'll raise the roof."

Then, turning to Ted, he added: "Mr. Strong, I'd like to have a few minutes' conversation with you in my private office. Please wait here, gentlemen," said he to the others. "We'll only be gone a few minutes.

"What I brought you in here for," he continued, after they had seated themselves in the private office, "was to have a talk with you about that man Mancos Jim. I saw you and Mr. Graham talking to him awhile ago."

"But surely you do not expect me," protested Ted, "to tell——"

"Certainly not," interrupted Big Aztec. "I'm not going to ask you what he said to you. I know that he must have said a good deal about me, for he can't talk ten minutes to a man without abusing me. And why? Because I'm running for marshal against him? Not much."

Big Aztec was silent several minutes and his eyes had a far-away look in them before he came to himself and continued:

"I don't object to telling you. Besides, he's out for marshal, and when a man's running for office, the public has a right to poke around in his past, to find out what he's done that he hadn't ought to. And Mancos Jim's done a lot of mean things in his time, and I know it, and he knows I know it, and that's what makes him hate me so. I don't pose as a saint myself, but I never went out of my way to kill a man that wasn't hunting trouble and didn't need killing. And that's more than Mancos Jim can say for himself."

"Yes," said the King of the Wild West, anxious to keep Big Aztec talking, for he wanted to draw him out.

"Mancos is a knife man, and he carries his weapon suspended in a scabbard between his shoulder-blades, under his coat. You might think that a funny place to carry a knife, but it has its advantages. He can reach back over his head and get it without giving his enemy the impression that he's going after his weapon. In a fight, when Mancos Jim throws up his hands to get his knife, he always shouts: 'Take him away, take him away, he's killing me!' You want to keep him far enough away from you so that you can get four or five shots at him before he can reach you."

"I thought you intimated awhile ago," said Ted, "that Mancos Jim was in a fight that wasn't on the square?"

"He was. It was up in the Uncompaghre Mountains, in Colorado, that he stabbed a miner in the back, killing him instantly, and that's a good sign that the man didn't have no show for his life. The Colorado boys've got ropes laid aside with which to hang him if he ever comes back there."

"Why haven't they sent after him?"

"Too busy, I suppose." And then, leaning over close to Ted, he added, in almost a whisper: "Don't you think it's about time he was taken back there?"

"What do you mean?"

"For one or the other of us to take him back to Colorado and turn him over to the tender mercies of the Uncompaghre boys. It would take a few kinks out of this campaign, and you and me could buck one another right. You can bet your sweet life that he'd never come back to bother us. I know how the boys feel about that fight."

"But how would you accomplish that?"

Big Aztec rose and went to the door, looked out to make sure there were no eavesdroppers around, came back and drew his chair up close to Ted's.

"I've got a little plan on foot now," said he, in half a whisper. "Sent the Jump boys in to shoot up the restaurant so Mancos Jim would arrest them. The jail's in a lonely spot on the other side of the town. Got men there waiting to nab Mancos. A wagon's waiting near to carry him back to Colorado, and before his friends find out what's happened, he'll be across the line. He didn't pinch the boys for the first racket, and I'm waiting now for their next move."

Just then there was shooting and yelling across the street, and Big Aztec ran out of the room, shouting for Ted to follow.

If Mancos Jim was kidnaped, Ted Strong would stand little show of being elected marshal of Gonzales. The lawless element would rally around Big Aztec. A critical moment in the campaign had come. He must act quickly.

CHAPTER III.

EVERYBODY BLUNDERS.

Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, rushed out and found Mr. Graham and the boys on the sidewalk in front of the gambling-house.

The street was crowded with excited men racing about, and there was a commotion in front of the White Elephant Saloon.

"Where's Big Aztec?" asked Mr. Graham.

"He left me in the private office and rushed out," said Ted. "Didn't you see him pass?"

"No."

"Queer sort o' fuss," said Bud Morgan. "There don't seem ter be no head er tail ter it."

"But there is," retorted Ted.

"Feller poked his head inter ther hall an' whistled," continued Bud, "an' then ther wuz a stampede, shore 'nough. Gamblers piled out o' ther hall like a bunch o' locoed yearlin's."

"Bud," said Ted sharply, "you and the boys run across to the White Elephant and find Mancos Jim. Stay with him and keep him out of the way of harm. Don't let the mob get hold of him."

The boys looked at him in an astonished sort of way.

"Run," continued Ted. "Mr. Graham and I will go to the jail and look for him. If you find him over at the saloon, send us word as soon as possible and we will join you. There's trouble in the air, but I haven't time to tell you what it is."

When Ted and Mr. Graham, panting from exertion, having run all the way, reached the jail, they were set upon by a mob of masked men, who rushed them down a side street for a block and tossed them into a wagon.

There were three men in the vehicle to receive them.

The masked men, having accomplishd what they had apparently been detailed to do, scattered, without making any effort to ascertain the identity of the two captives.

It had been too dark for them to see whether they had the right parties, and they were either too rattled or frightened to strike a match to ascertain.

And neither Ted nor Mr. Graham had had a chance to make an outcry, revealing their identity, because hands had been clapped over their mouths when they had been overpowered and held there while they had been hustled down the side street to the wagon.

The men in the vehicle told them to keep quiet if they didn't want to get hurt.

The driver cracked his whip, and the wagon clattered on out of town and was soon in the country. Then the King of the Wild West asked:

"Gentlemen, may I be permitted to put an appropriate question to you, before we go any further?"

"What is it?" growled one of the men.

"I know who you intended to get," said Ted. "But who do you suppose you have in this wagon?"

"I don't know who you are," returned the man, "but this man," slapping Mr. Graham on the knee, "is Mancos Jim."

"I don't believe it," retorted Mr. Graham, "and if you'll light a match, you'll find out that you've slipped your trolley."

"If that's you, Jim," replied the man, "you've sure enough modified your voice some since I heard you bray last. Whoa!" he added, addressing the driver of the wagon.

When the vehicle stopped, the man struck a match and held it first in front of Mr. Graham's face and then in front of Ted's.

"Well, I'll be durned!" he exclaimed. "I never saw either of you before, that I can remember. Who are you?"

"I'm Walter Graham, proprietor of the Los Gatos Sheep Ranch, which is situated a few miles south of town."

"I happen to know where the Los Gatos is, but it's the first time I've had the pleasure of meeting you."

"And what's your name, please?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Not to-night, sir," replied the man, and the driver and

his two companions laughed. "Some other time we'll meet, introduce ourselves, and have a good laugh over this incident."

"Have you any particular use for the young man who was captured with me?" continued Mr. Graham.

"I think not; but that reminds me, young man," continued he, addressing the King of the Wild West, "that you stated awhile ago that you knew who we thought we had. Now, how does it happen that you are so confounded wise?"

"Well," replied Ted, "I was talking to the gentleman who planned this trip, about this trip, when there was a row in front of the White Elephant Saloon, and we rushed out to see what was the matter. We got separated in the crowd, and Mr. Graham and I headed for the jail to see this expedition start."

"What's your name?"

"Ted Strong."

"The independent nominee for marshal of Gonzales?"

"Exactly."

"Well, this is too many for me to understand. It's as puzzling as the twister 'How old is Ann?' Bill," continued he, addressing the driver, "turn this procession in the direction of Gonzales and drive like you was going some place. Why, didn't you tell those gumps who put you in this wagon who you were?"

"They didn't give us a chance," said Ted. "Held their hands over our mouths, so we couldn't talk, and when we got into this wagon you said you'd shoot us if we peeped."

"Everybody seems to have blundered."

"Slightly," laughed Ted.

"And there'll be nobody at the jail to nab Mancos Jim when he appears there. It's awful! Big—I mean the gentleman you were talking with before this happened," he continued to Ted, "will simply be furious. I'll have to keep out of his way for a long time. Politics often cause funny complications."

"What were you going to do with Mancos Jim?" asked Mr. Graham, who didn't understand the situation at all, Ted not having had a chance to give him the details of the plot while they were hurrying to the jail.

"Ask your friend," replied the man. "He seems to be in possession of the facts. I'm not in a position to do any talking, but here we are back where we started from, and I don't see that motley mob of masked fools. I suppose they're already at home asleep, dreaming about what a fine thing they did to-night for their boss. Wait until they come down in the morning to get their reward! I hope," he added, to Ted, "that you'll do me the favor to tell the old man how it all happened. It may save the cost of a funeral."

"What does this all mean?" demanded Mr. Graham, after he and Ted had left the wagon and were hurrying up-town.

Ted told him what Big Aztec had said in the private office of the Last Chance gambling-house.

"Well, if that don't beat anything I ever heard of," said Mr. Graham, laughing. "By falling into this trap set for Mancos Jim, we did the independent party a good turn. This campaign is certainly getting interesting. We'll have to watch it mighty close now. When Mancos Jim hears what Big Aztec had ribbed up for him—and he'll be sure to hear it in the course of a day or so—he'll strike back, and strike hard, too. There's no doubt in my mind but that both candidates deserve hanging, but right now we can't allow one to swing and the other to go free. It wouldn't be in the interest of law and order."

"We were in luck to reach the jail ahead of Mancos Jim and his prisoners," said Ted, "but there is one thing certain. We don't want to do much talking about this incident. It might make Big Aztec mad, and we can't afford to do that at this stage of the game."

As they were talking, a heavy dray wagon approached them at a rapid rate and turned west down a side street.

Ted and Mr. Graham noticed that the driver, as he passed the street lamp at the corner, looked at them suspiciously.

"That man's up to some mischief," said the King of the Wild West. "Do you know him?"

"No. Did you notice that long box in the wagon and how he kept looking back every moment to see whether it was safe?"

"Yes. There must be something valuable in it. About the size and shape of a coffin box, wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Graham; "but that wasn't an undertaker wagon. It's one of the White Elephant drays, for I noticed Mancos Jim's name on the side."

"What could he be shipping this hour of the night?"

"I couldn't imagine. Besides, the driver is not headed for the depot. That's over on the other side of the town."

"Looks like he was headed for the Zuni Mountains."

"That's it," replied Mr. Graham. "Mancos Jim's got some men working on a claim out there, and he's probably sending them some provisions or powder."

"Rather late, I should think," insisted Ted, "to start on such a trip."

"Yes, it is a little out of the ordinary, when you come to consider the matter carefully. And that driver seemed so interested in the box."

They found the boys on the sidewalk, in front of the White Elephant Saloon.

"Where is the marshal?" demanded the King of the Wild West.

"That's what we'd like to know," replied Ben Tremont.

"We've searched this town in vain," said Clay Whipple.

"An' looked some fer you," added Bud.

"And you mean to say you have found no trace of him?"

"Not a trace," said Ben, "after Asa Jump's cowpunchers ran out of the White Elephant Saloon, shooting and yelling."

"And where are the cowboys?"

"Thet's somethin' we don't know, either," replied Bud.

"Where's Big Aztec?"

"Why," replied Kit, "we haven't been looking for him."

"Have you seen him while you were racing around town?"

"No."

"Then let's go over to the Last Chance gambling-house and look for him."

The place apparently held about the same number of people that were there when they called before.

Lon Hyde, the manager, came forward to meet them.

"Where is your employer?" asked Ted.

"I couldn't say," replied Hyde, smiling.

"Has he been here since the fuss over at the White Elephant a few hours ago?"

"No, and I haven't heard from him since he went out."

"You think he has taken a trip into the country, don't you?"

"He may have done so. Did he tell you anything when you were in the private office during your former visit here?"

"Yes; and I suppose you think that plan has been carried out?"

"I do."

"Humph!" exclaimed Ted; and he told the manager about the blunder the masked men had made.

"Great Scott!" cried Hyde. "Then something has happened to Big Aztec, or he'd be back here by this time."

Calling half a dozen of his lieutenants, he sent them across the street to the White Elephant.

They went up into the hotel and knocked at the door of Mancos Jim's room.

He was in bed, and refused to get up.

Jim said he had not seen Big Aztec all evening, and that it would not worry him a bit if he never saw him again.

The men hurried back to the Last Chance and reported what they had learned.

Big Aztec could not be found, and instantly the cry went up that he had been made way with by Mancos Jim.

Gamblers, friends of Big Aztec, sprang to their feet, shouting: "Tear down the White Elephant and lynch Mancos Jim."

In their haste to reach the street they made a great noise, upsetting chairs and poker-tables.

CHAPTER IV.

STELLA'S OPPORTUNE APPEARANCE.

Yelling, the mob crossed the street, Hyde's lieutenants leading the way and calling loudly for vengeance.

Mr. Graham, the King of the Wild West, and the young rough riders were swept by the moving throng through the White Elephant Saloon and up the stairway into the boarding-house.

Those in advance found the door of Mancos Jim's room locked.

"Break it open," encouraged those who were held back by the men in front.

"Gentlemen," shouted Ted, "do nothing of the sort."

A dozen men turned on him.

"And who are you," they demanded, "to give us orders?"

"Ted Strong, the independent nominee for marshal of Gonzales."

"And the friend and running-mate of Mancos Jim," was thrust at him.

"It is false," said he, drawing himself up to his full height.

There was the flash of steel as knives and revolvers were drawn and flourished.

The King of the Wild West folded his arms, threw back his head, and, with fine scorn, hissed:

"Cowards! Assassins! I dare you!"

The men near the door did not hear this altercation, and at that moment there was a crash, followed by a great shout.

The door had been hurled from its hinges.

Eager to witness what would follow, the men who were menacing Ted turned and leaped up the steps to the room.

Ted expected to hear a struggle, but there was none.

Mancos Jim was not in the room, he having fled, doubtless, when he heard the mob leave the Last Chance, stopping, however, to lock the door, in order to check his enemies and enable him to make good his escape.

At that moment there was a great uproar in the street in front of the saloon. A revolver-shot rang out, men were shouting, and there was a tramp of many feet.

Momentarily the noise increased, and Ted's trained ear quickly detected that a second mob was coming.

Mancos Jim had gathered his friends, and was doubtless leading them to attack the hotel.

It would be impossible for Ted and the boys to get out of the place without being seen.

They had been swept into a compromising position. They were in the company of Big Aztec's friends, who had invaded the White Elephant and broken down the door.

It would be impossible to convince the marshal that they were not aiding and encouraging the mob in its search for him.

There was nothing they could do but face the music now and fight Mancos Jim to a standstill.

Ted leaped down the stairway three steps at a time, and on the second-floor landing he encountered Mr. Graham and the boys.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Graham, clutching at Ted's arm.

"Drag the furniture out of the rooms on this floor," cried the King of the Wild West, "and build a barricade across this stairway."

The boys scattered to obey his command.

"We are in a serious trap this time," continued he, and he explained the situation to Mr. Graham, while the boys piled sofas, chairs, beds, and tables on the stairway.

"It would seem so, but I wonder why they do not come on and have it over."

They could hear men haranguing the crowd in the saloon below.

"They've got us treed," replied Ted, "and they know it, and they're planning an attack right now. You remain here with the boys and keep Mancos Jim's men from getting up-stairs."

Ted ran back to where he had left Big Aztec's friends. They were busy looking under the beds and searching the closets of all the rooms on that floor. Finding Hyde, the manager of the Last Chance gambling-house, he said:

"Give up the search. Mancos Jim and his friends are down-stairs, and they have shut off our escape from this building."

"What!" exclaimed Hyde, his face blanching. "You don't mean it!"

"Step over to this window," commanded Ted.

They did so, and the King of the Wild West raised the sash and threw open the shutters.

"Look at the sidewalk, in front of the saloon," he continued.

Instantly there was yelling below, and several shots were fired in rapid succession.

The window-panes were shattered into a million fragments, and Hyde leaped back.

His friends, hearing the shots, came running to ascertain what had happened, and in a few words he explained to them the situation. His story had a wonderful effect upon them. Fear made the men who had threatened the King of the Wild West with knives and revolvers on the stairway tremble, and Ted saw several of them looking about furtively, as though searching for a place to hide.

"I have assumed command of the forces in this building," said he sternly to Hyde. "Send some of your men down to the second-story landing to assist the young rough riders in holding back the mob at the barricade which has already been built."

The men picked up courage when they heard that measures had already been taken for their safety, and that there was no immediate danger of Mancos Jim rushing in and massacring them.

"If you know of any other way by which the enemy can gain entrance to this building," pursued Ted, "post men at that point to guard against surprise. And order your men to shoot anybody caught trying to desert."

After the men had been sent away, and while waiting for the first move of the enemy, Ted said to Hyde:

"It is very evident to me now that Mancos Jim has in some manner made way with Big Aztec, else he would not have acted the way he has this evening. I am inclined to believe your employer is not concealed in this building."

"What gives you that idea?"

"Why, if he was in here, Mancos Jim would not hesitate about attacking us. He and his men ere now would have rushed headlong into this building to drive us out in order to prevent us finding and releasing Big Aztec."

"Your reason seems to be a good one."

"But I believe," continued Ted, "that there must be some one in this building who does know what has become of him. Now I am very anxious to find your employer and set him at liberty, if he is alive."

"I will do all I can to aid you," said Hyde. "It is very kind of you to go out of your way to assist a man who is running against you for office. I am at your service."

"I wish you would make a search of this boarding-house for employees who might be able to give us a tip as to the whereabouts of Big Aztec."

Hyde hurried away, and the King of the Wild West rejoined Mr. Graham and the boys.

"Have they made an effort yet to get past the barricade?" he asked.

"Nary a effort," replied Bud Morgan, who, with a cocked revolver clutched in his hand, was peeping over the edge of a sofa.

"I don't understand this," protested Mr. Graham.

"We are in for a siege."

"But I want to go home. I've got to go."

"After you've been shot at a time or two, which is likely to be the case if you try to walk out, I think you'll change your mind."

"I've got you in a terrible fix. I ought to've had more sense than to drag you into this campaign. If I could reach the telegraph office I'd wire the governor to call out the militia."

"Oh, this is all right," laughed Ted. "Fine, ain't it, Bud?"

"Well, I'd reckon. Be a heap better ef them gabby boys down-stairs 'u'd saw off an' git down ter business. Ought ter make us show our hands soon, er go home ter bed."

While they were talking Hyde appeared, leading a badly frightened negro lad.

"Found the porter, and he's got something to tell," said Hyde, smiling, and then turning to the boy, he added: "Nigger, tell this white man what you know."

"Ah don't know nothin'," protested the boy.

"Yes, you do. Didn't Mancos Jim have Big Aztec in this building to-night?"

"Yas, Ah did see 'im brung in heah."

"Brought in here?" said Ted.

"Mancos Jim an' two er free gem'men toted 'im up heah from de s'loon. Had som'fin' over he mouth."

"What was it?"

"Er rag, an' dar wuz er rope tied round 'im."

"What did they do with him?"

"Toted 'im out ter der barn."

"And then what?"

"Ah don't knows what dey done to 'im. Ah was scairt an' hid. Dey wuz poundin' out dar er heap. An' den Ah hear er waggin' drive off. Den Mistah Jim he comes in an' goes up ter bed."

"Did they bring Big Aztec back into the house?"

"No, sah, Ah ain't seen 'im no moah."

"Was he alive when they had him in this building?"

"Yas, sah; kicked liked he wuz," laughed the negro. "An' he wuz powerful mad, 'cause he looked at Mistah Jim like he wanted ter saw som'fin' bad. Course he couldn't, 'count o' de rag over he mouth."

"What did Mancos Jim say?"

"He jest grinned. Dat's all."

"That," said Mr. Graham, looking at Ted, with astonishment writtten on his face, "that explains——"

"What was in the box," interposed the King of the Wild West, "which the drayman was hurrying away with."

"Enticed Big Aztec into the White Elephant, overpowered him, put him in a box, and shipped him, and the Lord only knows where."

"Quite a novel way to get rid of an opponent in a political campaign."

"Being so bitter against him, I don't understand why Mancos Jim didn't kill him and throw his body out into the street to his friends."

"Maybe Big Aztec, from his point of view, is worth more to him alive than dead."

"I fail to see it that way."

"It may be," continued Ted, "that Mancos Jim is going to hold him for a ransom."

"I don't think he would set him at liberty for money."

"Possibly not, but there are other things right now worth more to Mancos Jim than money. He might ask as the price of liberty that Big Aztec withdraw from the race for marshal of Gonzales."

"Yes, that's so," assented Mr. Graham, "but don't you think that you'd better go to bed in this fort? I'll stand watch with the boys and call you in case of an attack. I can sleep to-morrow while you are watching the campaign."

Ted followed the suggestion, and soon after he was in bed Mr. Graham had Big Aztec's friends open the front windows of the boarding-house and shout and make speeches for the King of the Wild West all night long. It gave the men in the street the impression that Ted

had stolen a march on Mancos Jim, and that nothing had been gained by spiriting Big Aztec away.

The sun was up when Ted awoke and found an urgent message for him to meet Mancos Jim at the door of the White Elephant.

"What right have you to break into my house and cast me into the street?" demanded the marshal, his face white with rage.

"I entered your place in search of Big Aztec," replied Ted calmly, "and you have besieged us. Where did you send the man you boxed and shipped last night?"

"Who says I did anything of the kind?"

"I say so, and so does the negro porter of this boarding-house."

"Gentlemen," said the marshal, turning to the men in the street, "you hear what he says. I say that it is a political lie sprung for the purpose of winning votes for the independent candidate for marshal of Gonzales, and, behold, the sainted candiate stands before you, the man who manufactured this lie about me."

The crowd yelled frantically: "Kill him, Jim!"

Ted, his cheeks crimson, made a movement forward, and the marshal, who had been watching him out of the corner of his eye while he was talking, wheeled about suddenly.

Throwing his hands behind his head, where his knife was concealed, Mancos Jim, crowding against Ted, began shouting:

"Take him away, boys; he's trying to kill me."

Ted had been too interested in what was taking place around him to notice a woman on horseback galloping down the street toward the crowd, and as Mancos Jim reached for his knife a rope swished over the heads of the people crowding around the King of the Wild West and the noose settled over the head of the marshal, jerking him violently backward through the crowd.

Stella Fosdick, coming to see what had detained Mr. Graham and Ted in Gonzales all night, had thrown the rope.

CHAPTER V.

A BROKEN CONTRACT.

Ted Strong ran back and shouted up the stairway to the boys and Mr. Graham, and in just a few minutes men were pouring out of the White Elephant boarding-house like bees out of a hive at swarming time.

When he returned to the sidewalk Stella was urging her pony up the street, dragging the marshal, who was struggling to free his arms so he could get at his knife and cut the rope.

His friends, having been drinking all night at his expense while besieging the hotel, were staggering, stumbling, and falling as they struggled forward, trying to overtake and release their chief. Ted and the boys ran past the shouting, cursing mob, and left them to the mercy of Big Aztec's friends, who were yearning to give them a flogging.

Bud Morgan wanted to stop and see the fun, but Ted and Mr. Graham were anxious to relieve Stella of her captive, and so they rushed ahead as fast as they could run.

When Stella looked back and recognized who was between her and the mob, she pulled her pony down to a walk, and they soon overtook her. The first thing Mr. Graham did was to run his hand beneath the collar of Mancos Jim's coat and take away his knife.

Bud whispered to Ted that the marshal was a sight, and he was. His hat was gone and his imperial beard was slightly out of plumb and full of dirt. His trousers were torn in many places, and his coat was ripped up the back and at the elbows.

He was in an awful humor, and when he got up, which he did with difficulty, the boys had to hold him to keep him from assaulting the King of the Wild West or Mr. Graham.

"Doubtless you think you have done a smart thing," snarled he at Stella, with an evil leer.

"If preventing you from stabbing Mr. Strong can be called smart, yes," snapped the girl.

It was the first intimation that the boys had had that Ted's life had been in danger, and they turned upon Mancos Jim, scowling. Bud went so far as to pretend to stumble, and in doing so managed to kick him on the shins.

"Don't make any foolish threats," said Ben Tremont to the marshal. "The puffawmance ees not yait hawf ovah."

"Well, I should say not," laughed Kit Summers. "Just take a look at the actors approaching."

Mancos Jim, frowning, glanced over his shoulder, and then the evil expression of his face gave way to one of fear.

The street was filled with men hurrying in their direction. Big Aztec's friends, having succeeded in routing the drunken mob in a general fist fight, were coming to take possession of Mancos Jim.

"I suppose you're going to let them do what they want to with me," said he to the King of the Wild West, in a shaky voice.

"What do you expect?" returned Ted.

"A square deal. Let me have my knife."

"You'll get that without the aid of a weapon."

"Do you mean to say that you think you can hold back that mob?"

"I do."

"Young man, you have many things to learn yet."

At that moment the mob surrounded them, howling and laughing.

"Got you at last, you old scoundrel," some cried, while others yelled: "Hurrah for Ted Strong and Stella Fosdick!"

The boys and Mr. Graham formed a circle, with the marshal, trembling with fright and begging for his knife, in the center, and turned their faces to the mob.

"Let me at him, let me at him!" cried Lon Hyde, manager of the Last Chance gambling-house, rushing up to Ted.

Reaching out, the King of the Wild West pushed the excited gambler back.

"Men, listen to me," said he, and they quieted down. "Last night, when we were besieged, you accepted me as your commander, and while we unexpectedly routed

the enemy and gained our liberty, I consider that I am still your leader. Mancos Jim——"

"Hang Mancos Jim!" yelled the mob, pressing forward.

Ted walked round the circle shoving men back, and when the uproar ceased for a moment, he continued:

"At present that would be a very unwise thing to do. He knows where Big Aztec is concealed, and we'll take him back to the Last Chance and give him a chance to tell what he knows."

"All right! and after that we'll stretch his neck," cried the mob. "Hurrah for Ted Strong!"

They marched back to the Last Chance, singing "John Brown" and popular dance-hall songs.

Mancos Jim had nothing to say during the trip, but in the private office of the gambling-house he became communicative.

Spies, he said, had put him next to Big Aztec's plan to kidnap him and turn him over to the Colorado boys, who wanted to hang him. Instead of falling into the trap, he had kept his eyes open and embraced the first opportunity to nab Big Aztec and give him a dose of his own medicine.

"No," said he. "I did not kill him, but I had a good chance to do so. Just nailed him up in a box, and one of my wagons took him away."

"Where?" asked Ted.

"Wait a moment. Now, this information is worth something to you men," looking round the room at the friends of Big Aztec. "If I'm to be strung up right after I get through talking, why, I'll not talk. That's all, and if you hang me for not talking, I think I have a few friends who will look after stretching the neck of Big Aztec until it is as long as a telegraph-pole before you can get there to cut him down."

"What are your terms, Mancos Jim?" pursued Ted, smiling.

"That I be set at liberty as soon as Big Aztec has been delivered to you alive, and that I not be molested in the faithful discharge of my duties as marshal of Gonzales thereafter."

"That's a reasonable proposition," assented Ted.

"And I want that in writing," continued Mancos Jim, "and signed by Mr. Graham, Mr. Strong, the rough riders, and the manager of this gambling-house."

A murmur of protest was heard from Big Aztec's friends, while Ted was preparing the document, and when it came Hyde's turn to sign his name, several men shouted:

"Lon, that's not right. You're cheating us."

The document being prepared and signed to his liking, Mancos Jim continued:

"He was taken to my mine in the Zuni Mountains. Most everybody knows where it is. I think, Mr. Graham, you've been out there."

"Yes," replied he, "I can find my way to it without any trouble."

"But one thing more," said Ted. "Write us a note to your man in charge, authorizing him to surrender Big Aztec."

It was agreed that Mancos Jim should be held a prisoner in the private office of the gambling-house until the rescue-party should return from the mines.

Mr. Graham, Ted, and Stella decided to make the trip. The boys were sent to the Los Gatos Ranch to inform Mrs. Graham what had occurred to keep Stella and Mr. Graham away from home.

"This certainly is a funny campaign," said Ted, after they had gotten outside the limits of Gonzales.

"Funny!" exclaimed Mr. Graham, turning in his saddle and eying the King of the Wild West. "There's been something serious happening every minute since you were nominated."

"Call it interesting, then," suggested Stella. "I don't think you've treated me right. Left me out of all the excitement."

"I think you've done your share," said her uncle, "roping the marshal and dragging him through the street."

"But I wouldn't have had a chance to do that much if aunt hadn't let me go to town to see what kept you out all night. And, remember, you haven't explained yet why you didn't come home."

"I insist," said Ted, after Stella had been told what had occurred during the night, "that this is a funny campaign. Here I am, nominated for marshal, doing nothing but taking care of the men who are running against me, exerting myself to see that neither is dropped from the race."

"If we could only manage it so that both could be lynched at the same time," replied Mr. Graham.

"That wouldn't do at all," protested Ted. "The two parties would then have a chance to nominate other men for the office."

"It would seem, then, that the best thing is for us to keep Big Aztec and Mancos Jim from tearing one another to tatters, keep rescuing them when their lives are in danger, and in that way will win friends from both sides and insure your own election. But if I am not badly mistaken, we are approaching the end of our journey. It strikes me that that cabin ahead is on Mancos Jim's claim."

It was, but they couldn't find Big Aztec. In fact, there wasn't a soul about the place. They shouted and fired their revolvers, and after waiting fully an hour, a man emerged from a thicket several hundred yards up the side of the mountain and yelled:

"What do you want down there?"

"Are you the manager here?" returned Ted.

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"I've got a note from Mancos Jim to you."

The man threw back his head and laughed.

"You must think I'm a hungry fish," said he. "Go away. I know you. You are friends of Big Aztec."

"I'm Ted Strong, and this gentleman is Mr. Graham, owner of the Los Gatos Sheep Ranch. Mancos Jim's in trouble, and that's one reason why we came to you."

The man disappeared and in about half an hour he emerged unexpectedly from a thicket behind the cabin, carrying a Winchester. He was a young man of good appearance, and when the situation in town had been explained to him, he said that a messenger had ridden out ahead of Ted, Mr. Graham, and Stella, with the news that the porter of the White Elephant had told where Big Aztec had been hidden and that a posse was coming to rescue him. So he had taken the captive out in the woods.

Well, in a short time Big Aztec was surrendered, and he was mighty glad to see the King of the Wild West. He was badly bruised and scratched, the result of being hauled thirty miles in a box over rough, rocky roads.

"I never dreamed," said he to Ted, on the way back to town, "when I was talking to you in my private office, that I would be the one kidnaped."

There had been so many delays that they did not reach town until after dark. They went directly to the Last Chance, where they found Lon Hyde, the manager, talking to Bud, Ben, Kit, and Clay, on the sidewalk. The gambler was delighted to see his chief and ran to assist him in dismounting.

"You can now release Mancos Jim," said Ted.

"He's—he's not here," stammered the gambler.

"Not here?" echoed the King of the Wild West.

"Well, you see," explained Hyde, "the boys got tired of waiting for you and they started with him for the Colorado line."

"Bully for the boys," cried Big Aztec, grinning.

But Ted Strong could not see it in that light.

CHAPTER VI.

TED IN A PERILOUS SITUATION.

Leaping to the sidewalk, the King of the Wild West whispered to Bud Morgan:

"You and Clay rush away and bring all your ponies here. Kit, you and Ben stand in the doorway and keep anybody from passing in or out."

Walking over to Mr. Graham and Stella, he said, in such low tones that Big Aztec and Hyde, who were talking and laughing over Mancos Jim's troubles, could not hear:

"We've got to overtake and bring back Mancos Jim. I would suggest that you and Stella go back to the ranch. It will be a strenuous trip, and you were up all night. So when Bud gets back with the riding-stock, you'd better scoot, for we are going to elevate Big Aztec to the back of a pony and take him along."

"I want to go," said Stella.

"Sh-sh-sh. You can't," said Ted. Then turning to Big Aztec, he added, in a loud tone of voice: "Miss Fosdick desires to speak with you." To the girl, he whispered, "Engage him in conversation and hold him."

And she did until Bud and Clay galloped down the street, each leading a horse.

Ted signaled to Ben and Kit, and they stepped up behind Big Aztec. Then the King of the Wild West led his pony along the curb, and when it was in front of the proprietor of the Last Chance, the boys suddenly lifted him into the saddle and Ted leaped up behind him.

Stella and Mr. Graham wheeled and rode away to the south.

The young rough riders sprang into their saddles and galloped away to the north, singing and shouting to drown the protests of Big Aztec and give the impression that they were a bunch of drunken cowboys leaving town.

Hyde was so surprised at the sudden turn in affairs that he stood staring after the horsemen and forgot to spread the alarm until the boys were out of sight.

At the edge of the town, Kit Summers dismounted, gave his pony to Ted, and went back. Then the boys rode on, leading Big Aztec's mount.

"This is an outrage," protested the gambler, as they galloped along the road over which Mr. Graham and Ted had been hauled by mistake the night before.

"No more so," replied the King of the Wild West, "than for your men to violate a contract and place me and my friends in a bad light before the people."

"But Mancos Jim ought to be hanged."

"That may be, but I don't see any urgent necessity for hurrying the event. You can postpone it until after the election."

"But he might get reelected."

"Then you'll have a good excuse for turning him over to the Colorado boys."

"But it will not be as easy to do then as now."

They had been riding several hours, stopping occasionally to dismount and light a match to see whether the wagon in which Mancos Jim was being carried away had left the north trail, when Big Aztec exclaimed:

"Boys, I've got an idea!"

"All right," said Ted. "Let it loose."

"I'll not hold any grudge against you," continued the gambler, "for taking me on this trip if you'll help me make Mancos Jim pull out of the race for marshal. We need not let on like we'd come to take him back until he has passed on the proposition of whether he wants to go on to Colorado or live the rest of his days in Gonzales as a private citizen. I know right now what will be his

decision, and, of course, if he should happen to disappoint [illegible] out retiring from the campaign, then you can do your little stunt, saying how you had come to carry him back to his friends. At least, be good enough to let me get some thing out of this wild night ride."

The King of the Wild West laughed.

"Why, what's wrong with that proposition?"

"You'll have to hold a grudge against me," replied Ted.

"You mean that you are not going to let me force him to get out of the race so that you and me can scrap it out together?"

"That's the situation."

"You are a stubborn, short-sighted young man."

"You mean far-sighted," corrected Ted.

"That's all I've got to say," snapped Big Aztec.

"Go ther other way," yelled Bud, galloping back from the front. "Ain't no waggin track here. Must've turned off a little ways back."

They rode slowly back, Bud walking and leading his pony and striking a match every little while to examine the road.

Presently Bud gave a low whistle of surprise.

"Turned off here," said he, "an' they ain't fur away. Left ther trail so's ter not be s'prised ef pursued. Campin' clost by, so everybody keep still."

They had not picked their way carefully more than a quarter of a mile when a horse neighed a short distance ahead, and Big Aztec rose in his saddle and gave a blood-curdling yell. It was a signal to his men, but they did not understand it to mean that danger was near. Instead they answered it with a great shout, and before they realized what was the matter, the young rough riders rushed into the camp and cut the ropes which held Mancos Jim to one of the wagon wheels.

They could not have put up much of a fight, anyway, for Jim had an escort of only four men, including the driver. It was the same outfit which had started to carry off Ted and Mr. Graham the night before. The same man was in charge, and it developed that his name was Oscar Hofer, and that he was one of Big Aztec's trusted lieutenants

Hofer was exceedingly disgusted when he understood what had happened.

"I should have carried you off when I had a chance," said he to Ted. "Might have known that you were working for Mancos Jim."

"Oscar, you're wrong," said Jim. "He's no friend of mine."

"Why, in thunder, didn't you bring a lot of men with you," stormed Big Aztec, addressing Hofer. "Then this would never have occurred."

"What's bothering you, now?" asked Mancos Jim. "Ain't you and your henchmen got me treed? What are you bellowing like a mad bull for?"

"[illegible] understand the situation," suggested Big Aztec. "[illegible] can go back to Gonzales if you'll withdraw from the race for marshal. That's what I come——"

"Hold on there," cried Ted. "I told you I wouldn't stand for any proposition like that." Then turning to Mancos Jim, he added: "I brought Big Aztec along to-night because he was in favor of going back on the contract we had signed."

"Do you mean to say that you and the young rough riders came this far to-night in order to keep me from being taken back to Colorado?" asked Mancos Jim incredulously.

"Exactly."

"And you wouldn't let me put Big Aztec out of the way when I had a fine chance."

"True."

"And now you won't let Big Aztec force me out of the race when he is itching for the opportunity?"

"You are right."

"It's time for you and me, Big Aztec, to quit fighting and keep our eyes riveted on this young man."

As it was nearly midnight the boys decided to get a little rest before going back to Gonzales. They had not had any supper, and as the kidnapers were well supplied with food, Bud Morgan soon had a nice meal prepared.

After eating, they rolled up in their blankets and slept until daylight. Big Aztec, expressing a wish to ride in the wagon with Mancos Jim, which was a surprise to all, Hofer mounted Kit's horse and the party was soon creeping back toward the starting-point.

But the pace set by the wagon was too slow for the King of the Wild West. Leaving the boys to guard the outfit, and bidding Big Aztec and Mancos Jim be good and not hurt one another, he hurried on to town.

Ted was pleased with the situation. What he had done for his rivals, he believed, had gained him some friends. If he could prevent ballot-box stuffing on the day of election, he felt that he would be able to win.

It was about nine o'clock when he reached the outskirts of Gonzales, and, looking back before he turned into Main Street on which the White Elephant and the Last Chance gambling-house were located, he could just make out the wagon and the boys, tiny specks on the rim of the horizon.

At that moment his attention was engaged in another direction. There came faintly to his ears a chorus of yells. He listened and there were others, and he was able to make out that they came from the heart of the town.

Even at that distance he could tell that the shouting was done by angry men, and his blood tingled. There was serious trouble in Gonzales.

With a wistful look at the tiny specks on the horizon, he put spurs to his pony and galloped into town, the shouting increasing in volume each moment.

As he approached the White Elephant, he saw a sight which greatly alarmed him.

Both sides of the street were lined with men who were gesticulating, yelling, and cursing. As he sped along, he could not imagine what had happened to turn the town mad.

The clatter of his pony's hoofs attracted the attention of the men. They ceased their clamor and stared at him for a few moments. Then a mighty shout rent the air.

They had recognized him, and he saw that he was in some measure responsible for the peculiar demonstration in the street.

As he galloped down the street between the two lines of men, he began to realize that he had ridden into a dangerous position.

They were deriding and cursing him and calling him evil names. He saw that they were armed and drawn up in battle array. On one side, he knew, were the friends of Big Aztec and on the other those of Mancos Jim, and that they had been daring each other to fight before he had arrived. He saw the whole situation in an instant.

"There he is. There's the fellow who carried off Big Aztec last night. Hang him," shouted one line of men.

From the other side of the street he could hear: "There's the young man who took Big Aztec away from us and got Mancos Jim into trouble. Kill him."

Realizing that if he tried to ride past or remained seated in the saddle he would be shot, he halted his pony and leaped to the ground. That placed both sides in an awkward position. They could not open fire on Ted without hitting the men on the opposite side of the street and starting a general battle, which neither side seemed anxious to do.

"Gentlemen," said the King of the Wild West, when he was able to make himself heard, "Big Aztec and Mancos Jim are safe."

"Where are they?" was hurled at him from both sides of the street.

"They are approaching the town now in a wagon," replied he.

"Both riding in the same wagon?" demanded both sides.

"Yes, and if you will have patience they will soon be here."

That was too much for the crowd. That two men as bitter against each other as Big Aztec and Mancos Jim were riding in the same wagon—well, it wasn't so.

Both sides made a rush for the King of the Wild West. He could gain nothing by making a fight. He looked up the street before they closed in and shut off his view, to see whether the wagon was in sight. It was not.

Big Aztec's men reached him first, and as he had his face turned to them, trying to push them back, Mancos Jim's friends slipped up behind and grabbed him by the legs. They tripped him, and as he fell forward Big Aztec's friends clutched his arms.

"Let us handle him," they said.

"No," protested Mancos Jim's men, "give him to us."

Then began a tug of war, and the King of the Wild West was in imminent danger of being pulled in two.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. GRAHAM'S DISCOVERY.

When Ted felt that he was about to lose his arms and legs, and was on the point of swooning on account of the intense pain, he heard a girl scream, and a horse plunged into the midst of the struggling men.

On the frightened animal sat Stella Fosdick, and she was striking viciously right and left with her quirt. Before her fierce onslaught, the gamblers fell back, yelling whenever she hit them.

Stella had come to town with Mr. Graham, who was following her closely, to hear what had happened to the boys during the night. They had reached Gonzales in the nick of time to save Ted's life.

When the gamblers fled, they released the King of the Wild West, and he scrambled to his feet. But he was very weak and staggered, and Mr. Graham leaped from his saddle and caught him in his arms.

Stella hastily dismounted, after she had driven the crowd away, and ran to him, inquiring if he was badly hurt.

"No," he said, smiling grimly, "I'll be all right in a few minutes.

"You had a narrow escape," said Mr. Graham.

"And I feel narrow," replied Ted. "I must be at least eight feet taller than I was before this tug of war between the friends of Big Aztec and Mancos Jim."

"Well, uncle," said Stella, "he's able to crack jokes, and that's a very good sign that we'll yet have a chance to elect him marshal of Gonzales."

"But how did it all happen?" inquired her uncle.

Ted told them.

"The scoundrels," said Stella indignantly. "They were not brave enough to shoot one another, but had to jump on you. Well, I gave a few of them some blows that they are likely to remember for awhile."

"I am very thankful for your assistance," replied the King of the Wild West.

"Here comes the wagon and the boys," cried Mr. Graham, and the crowd rushed away to rally round their chiefs.

When they saw that what Ted had told them was the truth, many came back and begged his pardon.

"I realize now," said he to them, "that what I said must have sounded a little unreasonable."

They left him, yelling: "Hurrah for the King of the Wild West."

"Seems like," said Big Aztec, when the wagon had stopped near Ted, "that you've been electioneering a lot since you've got back to town, judging from the way the boys are shouting for you."

"They tried to kill him first," snapped Stella. "They've been under the leadership of evil men so long that they do not know the truth when they hear it."

Mancos Jim pretended that he did not hear her and gave the front of the White Elephant a careful inspection, as though trying to determine whether the structure needed a fresh coat of paint.

"Well, miss," said Big Aztec pleasantly, "you ought to be running for marshal of Gonzales. You make a good campaign speech."

"If I were marshal," continued she sharply, "I'd drum a lot of riffraff out of this town. You and Mancos Jim and a lot of men of your stripe would find this climate unhealthy. If I were marshal, there wouldn't be two factions lined up on opposite sides of the street, yelling, cursing, threatening to shoot one another and trying to tear to pieces law-abiding people who might happen to ride or walk between them."

"I'm stabbed!" exclaimed Big Aztec, with mock seriousness, clapping his hand over his heart. "Take her away, take her away."

The crowd cheered and laughed.

"That's my ticket," said Stella, with a toss of her head.

"It's a good strong one," assented Big Aztec, getting out of the wagon.

Mr. Graham induced Stella to leave the vicinity of the vehicle, and the hardened gamblers in the crowd cheered her as she walked away leaning on her uncle's arm.

"Jim and me are mighty thankful to you," said Big Aztec, turning to Ted, "for saving us from the wrath of one another, but this is no time for us to make a public show of how we feel. We had a little talk as we rode in, and we think we understand one another."

"Yes," said Mancos Jim, "and we thought it right to tell you, since you have acted, or rather appeared to act, on the square with us."

"Why should you say that I have appeared to act on the square?" demanded Ted.

"You're running for marshal against us, ain't you?"

"Yes.

"What you've done for us has been done to gain votes."

"I'll not know until after the election whether that is so."

"Well, it's got to be Big Aztec or me. If he is elected, I leave town, and if I remain in office, he is to pull his freight. That is the situation now, and from now on we're going after you with a sharp stick."

"But suppose I'm elected," said Ted, "what are you men going to do, then

Big Aztec and Mancos Jim threw back their heads and laughed.

"You ain't got a ghost of a show," replied Jim.

"I'm sorry," interposed Big Aztec, "but we couldn't think of letting that happen. In view of what you have done for me, I'd like to step out of my way and do you a favor now and then, but I can't see my way clear. You've been playing the part of peacemaker, and you know what usually happens to a peacemaker, and if you don't we're going to show you mighty quick."

"Big Aztec and me," said Mancos Jim, "were fighting until you came along, and now we are going to forget what it was about until we put you out of business."

"All right," replied Ted. "Have it your way, but there is one thing that is certain: You'll not have to go round looking for me with a lantern. During the rest of this campaign, my headquarters will be in the Metropole Hotel, and you'll be sure to find some one there to receive you when you call."

"Thanks," said Mancos Jim sarcastically. "When we get some cards printed, we'll drop around to see you."

They stepped to one side, out of Ted's hearing, and talked for a few minutes, and then Mancos Jim crossed the street to the White Elephant, and Big Aztec, surrounded by his friends, entered the Last Chance.

"Well," said Mr. Graham, rejoining the King of the Wild West, "have they made up and turned on you?"

"It would seem so."

"Great Scott! Then our troubles have just started. How, in the world, did it happen?"

"Ted let 'em ride back ter town in ther waggin," said Bud Morgan, "an' after he wuz gone they got right friendly an' talked an' laughed all ther way back ter town."

"Believe you should have kept them apart, Ted," suggested Mr. Graham, shaking his head.

"Failing to get rid of one another, it was the natural thing for them to do, but I don't expect much of their treaty of peace. Both are appealing to the same class of voters for support, and both are fighing me, which will make this an interesting campaign from now on. There is going to be something happening every minute."

"I don't see how it can be any more active than it has been. We've been right busy since you were nominated."

The boys, Mr. Graham, and Stella went to the Metropole to select rooms for the independent party headquarters. Night was approaching when all arrangements had been made, and Mr. Graham, expressing a desire to remain in town and watch things, Ted detailed Bud to accompany Stella to the Los Gatos, after which he was to return to Gonzales.

Stella did not like the arrangement, as she wanted to stay and see the fun, but Mr. Graham thought she would be safer at the ranch. He was afraid that Mancos Jim

and Big Aztec, as they had announced that they were going to fight Ted, would start a row, and even if they put it off, Gonzales after dark, since the nominations for marshal, was not a safe place for a woman.

The lawless element was taking advantage of the situation. Mancos Jim, since he was a candidate for reelection, could not afford to interfere with their rowdyism. It might lose him votes.

The cattlemen who were trying to drive the sheepmen out of the country, and who were in favor of a wide-open town, with saloons and gambling-houses on every corner, were in their glory. Every night they came to Gonzales, raced their ponies through the principal streets, rode into saloons for drinks, made sheep-herders dance to the tune of six-shooters when they caught them, and shot out the street lamps before they would start for home. Mancos Jim and Big Aztec, who wanted their votes, looked on and applauded these irregularities, so very disconcerting to nervous, peace-loving people.

After Stella and Bud had been gone awhile, and night had fallen, Lon Hyde, Big Aztec's gambling-house manager, slipped into the Metropole and went to Ted's room.

"How do you feel since the boys tried to pull you in two this morning?" he asked.

"Fine," replied Ted. "Have a chair."

"They were a little rough," continued Hyde, taking the chair, "but then they were not in the humor to understand. Going to be big doings to-morrow."

"What?"

"Two monster parades in the morning."

"Oh, yes, we did hear something about that. But why does Big Aztec and Mancos Jim parade in the morning instead of at night?"

"Jingling's circus will be in Gonzales to-morrow night, and, of course, everybody will want to go to it. Those parades are certainly going to be swell. Bands, banners, flags, and a lot of cowboys. Mancos Jim's parade forms on the south side of town, and, after he has marched across to the north side, where Big Aztec's forms, we'll march back over the same route. They're going to give one another a square deal, but, say, neither of them ought to get the office. You should have it."

"What are you up to, anyway?" asked Ted, amazed at man's admission.

"Well, you see, I'm well known in this community. The boys like me, and I control a good many votes. Now I could throw those votes to you."

"For what?"

"If you'd run Mancos Jim and Big Aztec out of town after you're elected and give me permission to keep a gambling-house."

"Oh, I see. You want Big Aztec's place."

"Well, yes, that's what I mean."

"Of course I'd like to get your support, but then I'm running on a ticket which calls for the closing of the saloons and gambling-houses, and if I am elected, that's what I'm going to do."

"But most public officers, after they're elected, fail to remember the promises they made during their campaigns."

"But I will not," said Ted sharply, "and I do not thank you for coming here with such suggestions."

"Then you'll never be elected," said Hyde, rising and starting for the door.

"I think I will."

"You'll not get my vote."

"I can do without it."

Hyde went out and slammed the door, and at that moment Mr. Graham entered and said that he was worried about Bud. Ted looked at his watch, and was surprised to note that Bud had been gone five hours.

"I am going to ride out and see what is the matter," continued Mr. Graham. "I'm afraid something has happened."

He was away about an hour when he returned greatly excited.

"They're gone!" he exclaimed, rushing into the room.

"Who's gone?" cried the King of the Wild West, springing to his feet and dropping the paper he was reading.

"Mrs. Graham, Stella, and Bud."

"Where?"

"Nobody knows, but I'm sure those cowardly gamblers and cattlemen have made way with them. I am going up to shoot Big Aztec and Mancos Jim," cried he, drawing his revolver and making a dash for the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

STELLA'S ELEPHANT PARADE.

The King of the Wild West sprang in front of Mr. Graham, saying, "Wait a moment."

"Out of my way, young man," commanded Mr. Graham. "Not a second must be lost. I'll show outlaws whether they can invade my home and carry off my wife, relatives, and friends, simply because I have been instrumental in securing your nomination for marshal of Gonzales. Let me pass, I say."

"Let's talk the matter over first," protested Ted soothingly, for the proprietor of the Los Gatos was terribly aroused.

"There isn't anything to talk over. They're gone—my wife, Stella, Bud."

"But have you any evidence that Mancos Jim or Big Aztec had anything to do with their disappearance?"

"Who else would spirit them away? and I am absolutely certain that they were forcibly carried off. Mrs. Graham would have left word for me if she had gone away of her own accord. No, sir, I tell you that there has been foul play."

"Well," said Ted, "wherever they may be, Bud is with them, and I can assure you that he will not let them be harmed."

"He is a brave young man, I know, but what show would he have in the hands of the friends and partisans of Big Aztec and Mancos Jim? Very little. I see the motive of your words. You want to calm my fears, lead me to believe they are safe, when I know they're not."

"The thing for us to do is to make a careful search."

"I think I've done that already, and I can find no one who has seen them, no one who has so much as seen Bud and Stella after they left Gonzales for the ranch about sundown."

"Does the house show signs of having been invaded?"

"No," replied Mr. Graham. "There were no evidences of disorder, that I could see, but then I may have been too badly excited to make a careful examination. I was deadfully upset when I found no one at home."

"Were the doors locked?"

"No, but that does not indicate anything. In this country people seldom lock their doors, even when they leave home on visits."

"Were there no servants at the ranch?"

"Yes, but they knew nothing. This was their afternoon off, and they were in town and did not return until after dark. Mrs. Graham and Stella were gone then, but that did not alarm them, for they were under the impression that Mrs. Graham was with me. They knew that Stella had come to town with me this morning, and when they found no one at the ranch, they took it for granted that Mrs. Graham had ridden in after us."

Mr. Graham had put away his revolver, but he was nervously pacing the room.

"It certainly is strange," said Ted.

"Strange?" echoed Mr. Graham. "I should say it was as plain as the nose on your face that they have been kidnaped by the gamblers. And I tell you that I am going to make Big Aztec and Mancos Jim tell me where my wife is, and then I am going to kill them."

"Better let me do that," suggested Ted. "If you'll remain here, I'll go out and investigate. I'd be likely to get more information than you, because they would close up like a lot of clams if you went to them. Besides, you'd probably lose your temper and kill somebody before you learned where your wife was being detained. And if you did anything like that, the gang would probably get even with you by torturing Mrs. Graham."

"Yes, yes. I see you're right, but please hurry back. I cannot stand this suspense much longer."

Taking Ben, Kit, and Clay with him, Ted searched every nook and corner in Gonzales for information, and interviewed Mancos Jim and Big Aztec, whom he found eating supper together in the White Elephant boarding-house.

At first the marshal and Big Aztec considered Ted's inquiry in the light of a joke, but when he assured them that Stella, Mrs. Graham, and Bud were gone and no trace of them could be found, they accused him of preparing the story for political purposes.

"I'll admit that they cannot be found at the ranch," said Mancos Jim, "but that does not prove that me or Big Aztec kidnaped them. If you was to search from now until the end of the world, you'd never be able to find anybody who could truthfully swear that I had anything to do with the disappearance of your friends."

"And I can say the same thing in my own behalf," said Big Aztec.

"Well," replied Ted, "all I've got to say to you men is that if you make the crack in the presence of Mr. Graham that he hid his wife in order to manufacture material against you, you'll be shot before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' He is very much excited."

"I refuse to be bulldozed and slandered," said Mancos Jim, rising from the table and facing the King of the Wild West.

"Keep your clothes on," advised Ted coolly, with a wave of his hand. "Never start anything you can't finish. You made your threat this afternoon that you were going after me with a sharp stick, and that being the case, it looks like this kidnaping was your work."

"It may look that way," retorted Mancos Jim, "but it is not so, and to convince you that I'm telling the truth, I'm going out right now to hunt for your friends and to keep hunting for them until they are found."

"And I'm going to help him," said Big Aztec, rising and going out with Mancos Jim.

It was long past midnight when Ted and the boys returned to the Metropole and found Mr. Graham greatly bewildered.

"Just look at that," said he, handing Ted this telegram, which had just been delivered to him:

"ALBUQUERQUE, N. M., April 22, 1906.
"MR. WALTER GRAHAM, Metropole Hotel, Gonzales, N. M.
"Safe. Do not be alarmed. Have boys at headquarters at nine o'clock to-morrow to see parades.
"STELLA, BUD, MRS. GRAHAM."

"Well," said Mr. Graham, after the King of the Wild West had read the message, "do you understand it?"

"I have no more idea than the man in the moon what the message means," replied Ted, "but the signature would indicate that Mrs. Graham, Stella, and Bud were in Albuquerque. Has your wife been talking lately of going down there?"

"No. Stella and Bud must have had to hurry to catch the train. Must have run their horses all the way out to the ranch and back."

"Have you any idea what they went down for?"

"Oh, I suppose," said Mr. Graham disgustedly, "that it

was for some urgent reason like the purchase of one yard of pink ribbon and a bottle of perfumery."

Ted and the boys laughed.

"The idea," pursued Mr. Graham, "of racing clear down to Albuquerque in order to telegraph us to watch the parades to-morrow. Of course, we'll watch the parades to-morrow. We would have done that if the telegram had not called our attention to it. Is your friend, Bud Morgan, right smart? He seems to be a party to this crime against us."

"Bud is level-headed, and he is not going to allow himself to be led off on any wild-goose chases. I'm going to believe that they suddenly stumbled upon some political information, calling them to Albuquerque, which they did not have time to convey to us before they departed."

"Well, whatever it is, it nearly cost the lives of two candidates for the office of marshal of Gonzales, and, by the way, what's the use of us sitting up all night trying to solve this puzzle? Let's go to bed."

They did so, and as they had not had a chance to get much sleep since Ted had been nominated for marshal, it was late when they got up, forcing them to hurry with their breakfast in order to get through in time to see the parades.

They went back to Ted's room from which they could get a splendid view of the street in both directions.

They were still trying to solve the puzzling telegram from Mrs. Graham and discussing the unexpected arrival of the circus during the early morning.

"Pshaw!" said Ben. "I wish there wasn't any bloomin' parades. I want to see them put up the circus tents. It's more interesting than the show."

"Here comes Mancos Jim's outfit," cried Kit excitedly, leaning far out of the window and looking to the south. "Hear the music."

The rest of the boys and Mr. Graham ran and leaned out of the window to listen.

Sure enough. They could distinctly hear the cowboys yelling and the band playing "The Conquering Hero."

"See 'em now!" exclaimed Ben.

Yes, they could all see the swinging line of men and horses, carrying flags and banners, see the flash of reflected sunlight from the polished musical instruments, see the gaudily dressed bandmaster far in the lead, so he would attract attention to himself, twirling his huge baton above his head.

While they were intently watching the approaching pageant, they were startled by a series of raucous sounds up the street.

"Elephants!" they cried in chorus, and then turned to look.

It was certainly an astonishing sight which they saw. They were too surprised to talk for awhile.

Out of a side street, a block away, swept ten huge elephants. They lined up across Main Street, making a bulwark which reached from sidewalk to sidewalk.

Then the mahouts uttered shrill cries, and the elephants, keeping abreast like soldiers, swept down the street at a swinging trot toward Mancos Jim's parade.

"Why, it's not a circus," cried Ben and Kit. "Look at the banners."

Along the sides of the elephants were hung long strips of bunting on which were written "Vote for the King of the Wild West," "Ted Strong for Marshal of Gonzales," "We Stand for Law and Order," and "Down with Gambling-houses and Saloons."

On each elephant sat a woman, but as they wore heavy veils the boys could only guess at their identity. They didn't look like circus performers, as the boys were quick to notice.

On swept the phalanx of elephants. On came Mancos Jim's parade. The situation was rapidly growing interesting.

There was no room for the parades to pass each other. A head-end collision was certain. Which would gain the right of way?

The question was solved while the boys and Mr. Graham stood gaping at the spectacle.

The bandmaster dropped his baton and turned and fled. The music ceased suddenly. A man mounted on a black horse galloped to the head of the parade.

The horseman, the excited boys could see, was Mancos Jim. They could hear his voice raised in angry protest. At that moment all of the ten elephants, it seemed, began to trumpet, and the black horse wheeled about so suddenly that Mancos Jim lost his balance and pitched to the sidewalk.

After that—well, the parade looked confused. There was a scandalous retreat. The cowboy ponies, not being used to elephants, stampeded. But that didn't seem to bother the elephants a bit. They kept right on, and in a few minutes Mancos Jim's splendid, dazzling parade was out of business entirely.

Before the boys could recover sufficiently from their surprise to talk, their attention was attracted by a band up the street. And it, too, was playing "The Conquering Hero."

Big Aztec's parade was approaching.

Naturally the boys turned to see what had become of the elephants. They had turned and were coming up the street. There was going to be another stampede.

"I'm glad my wife telegraphed me to watch this," said Mr. Graham, and then he added: "Well, I'll be——"

The women seated on the elephants had lifted their veils, and the boys recognized Stella, Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Cash, and Mrs. Scott.

A mahout waved his hat at them and gave the cowboy yell.

He was Bud Morgan!

CHAPTER IX.

HOW IT WAS DONE.

Mr. Graham and the boys were too astonished to even lift their hats to the women.

The elephants, trumpeting incessantly, as if they were talking over the fun they were having, surged past the hotel and on up the street.

"Well, if that don't beat anything I ever heard of," said Mr. Graham, finding his voice.

"It's a bright idea!" exclaimed Ted.

"Seems to be a moving argument," offered Ben.

"Great discovery," cried Kit. "After this politicians will see that elephants can add interest to a campaign."

"Suppose," interposed Ben, "those ten elephants going up the street should meet ten elephants coming down the street, what would take place?"

"That leads up to what I wanted to say," said Kit. "Instead of going to the polls and fighting one another for a chance to vote, it would be more interesting to have rival candidates for the same office leave the fate of their election to the outcome of an elephant-fight in the leading street of the city. It would be fair, and everybody could see how it was done, which we can't with our ballot-box system of electing officers."

"Boys, boys," said Mr. Graham, "that would never do. What would become of the professional politicians?"

"Make elephant-drivers out of them," retorted Kit, "and when there wasn't a campaign on, they'd find plenty to do taking care of their election stock."

"I'll admit that that kind of an election would be interesting," replied Mr. Graham.

"They're off!" yelled Ted, and everybody turned to look up the street.

Of course Big Aztec's parade got scattered like Mancos Jim's. Big Aztec was riding in a hack, and when the horses smelled the elephants, they started backing, the street being so crowded with cowboys and pedestrians that the driver could not turn round, and rammed the hack through the plate-glass window of a drug store.

After Big Aztec's parade had got out of sight, which it did with remarkable speed, the elephants were marched back to the Metropole Hotel.

"Come down and take a ride about town," cried Stella. "Might as well, for Mr. Jingling let me have them for that purpose."

Mr. Graham and the boys descended to the street, and Stella making her elephant kneel, Ted took a seat beside her. Mr. Graham climbed up beside his wife, and Ben, Kit, and Clay mounted the one Bud was driving.

Then with the elephants marching single file, so that the people could read the writing on the banners attached to their sides, they paraded back and forth through Gonzales for several hours, being cheered generously by the best people of the town, who flocked to the street to show the King of the Wild West that they approved of him for marshal.

The cowboys of Big Aztec and Mancos Jim's parades could not get their ponies near enough to the elephants to intimidate Ted's friends, though they repeatedly tried to do so after recovering from the stampedes.

"This elephant parade is a fine idea," said the King of the Wild West soon after they had started. "What suggested it to you?"

"Bud had heard of the proposed parades of Big Aztec and Mancos Jim," replied she, "and, of course, we all knew that the circus was coming to town. Well, as we rode home discussing plans for preventing the parades, Bud suggested that if we could borrow the circus elephants we could scare all of the cowboys out of town. Then we remembered that the circus was not due to arrive in Gonzales until along in the afternoon. Bud suggested that it would be a good idea to run down to Albuquerque and hurry the circus on to Gonzales, if that was possible."

"How did you get Mrs. Graham to go with you?" interposed Ted.

"Well," continued she, "Bud and I made a record ride to Los Gatos, and laid our plan before aunt. It happens that she and uncle, before they came out West, were old friends of Mr. Jingling and his family, and aunt said she was certain that she could borrow the elephants for a parade if we could get the circus here ahead of time. We soon convinced her that we had to have the elephants if we ever expected to elect you, and she agreed to go with us to Albuquerque, where the circus was showing, and rush matters. And we succeeded, as you no doubt have observed."

"You certainly did fine, but you should have told us before you left."

"We didn't have time; just managed to get back to the depot as the train from the west was pulling in. Bud was afraid you would get uneasy about his absence, send somebody out to the house, and discover that we were gone, and so we sent you the message. Did you get it before you found out that we were gone."

"You came near causing a tragedy," replied Ted gravely.

"A tragedy?" cried she.

Ted told her about the time he had keeping Mr. Graham from going out and shooting Big Aztec and Mancos Jim.

"I'm so sorry," said she.

"And that's not all," he went on. "I went up and accused my opponents for the office of marshal of Gonzales of kidnaping you, and it made them mighty hot, and the manner of your reappearance will put Mr. Graham and myself in a bad light. I'm looking for trouble now, lots of it."

"Will it lessen your chances of election?"

"I cannot say, but I am certain that Big Aztec and Mancos Jim will put their heads together and endeavor to devise a plan to get even. You couldn't hardly blame them," laughed Ted, "for they have each had a misfortune to-day that they will remember as long as they live."

"Well," said Stella, with a toss of her head, "we can't help it, if cowboy ponies are afraid of elephants. We had as much right to have a parade as they had, and it's not our fault if they chose the same street that we saw fit to use. If they kick up a fuss, tell them that. I should think that anybody could see that they had no grounds for complaint."

The King of the Wild West laughed.

"How is it," said he, "that Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Scott, and Mrs. Cash happen to be in this parade? Did they go with you to Albuquerque?"

"Why, we got here early, before you got up, I'll wager, and so we went to Mrs. Gordon's for breakfast. We didn't want to come near you. We wanted to give you a surprise."

"You did."

"But here we are back at the hotel," said Stella. "Shall we disband here? I want something to eat."

They all went into the hotel for lunch, and the elephants were taken back to the circus-ground, after which Jingling gave a parade.

"I fancy," said Mr. Graham, "that our friend, Jingling, will not do very well in this town. I think the friends of Big Aztec and Mancos Jim will stay home to-night."

"Mr. Graham," said his wife, "has been fussing at me ever since he has had a chance to talk to me. He says I have got you in a terrible fix, Mr. Strong, though he has not seen his way clear to explain yet. What is it I've done?"

"A lot for which I am very thankful," replied the King of the Wild West. "You routed Big Aztec and Mancos Jim, which we would not have been able to do single-handed. You saved the day. Mr. Graham probably has reference to the fact that he was considerably worried last night when, before your telegram arrived, he discovered that you were gone."

"I want you women to be very careful now," cautioned Mr. Graham. "Fact is, that when we learned last night that you were gone, we accused Big Aztec and Mancos Jim of kidnaping you, and I'm afraid that they will try to get even."

"I would suggest," said Ted, "that you, Ben, Kit, and Clay remain at the ranch to guard the women. Bud will stay here with me."

"That's a good idea, but who is going to guard you?"

"Bud and I will be able to take care of ourselves."

"Why not come out to the ranch nights?"

"That wouldn't do at all. It would look like I was afraid—which would be used as campaign material against me."

"Yes, you're right. I'll never have any peace of mind until this campaign is over. If anything happens to you I'll always blame myself for having dragged you into the race against two of the meanest scoundrels in the country."

"Don't let that worry you. When the smoke clears away I think it will be found that we have won."

"Well," said Mr. Graham, rising from the table, "if we are going to the circus, I guess we'll have to be moving, as we'll have to ride out to the ranch first to get ready."

"We couldn't miss the circus," said Mrs. Graham, "since Mr. Jingling has been so good as to help us out."

"What did this elephant stunt cost?" asked her husband. "Suppose he charged you enough?"

"Not a cent. When I told him in whose interest they were to be used, he said he was delighted to let us have them, as the newspaper advertisement he would get out of the incident would be worth a good deal to him."

"Well, I should say so," said Ben. "I saw a bunch of newspaper men down at the telegraph office awhile ago writing as if they had a grudge against the operators and wanted to swamp them with work."

Ted accompanied them to the sidewalk, where he met Bud Morgan, who had been out skirmishing for news.

"Have you learned anything?" asked the King of the Wild West.

"Mancos Jim's ordered ther Jinglin' circus ter hit ther trail."

"What right has he to run the show out of town?"

"Well," said Bud, "I'm not a jedge, an' so don't know. But right after his parade got scairt at ther elephants, he called ther town council, or whatever it's branded, together. Seems like he owns thet council, fer he told 'em thet Jinglin' couldn't show here, an' ther council said it wouldn't give him no license."

"What's Jingling going to do?"

"He said he'd show, license or no license, an' Mancos Jim sent 'im warnin' thet he'd run 'im inter ther Gulf o' Mexico ef he made any fool breaks like thet. Yes, Jim is some mad, an' I expect there's goin' ter be a fuss at ther show."

"Well, I'll see that Mr. Jingling receives fair treatment."

"When Jim fell off his black horse ter-day, he mashed his nose, an' he's got a peach o' a black eye."

"Yes, and he'll have two black eyes to-morrow if he tries to stop that show to-night."

"An' he's got trouble o' some kind ribbed up fer you," continued Bud.

"How do you know?"

"'Cause ther gamblers I know hev been droppin' hints."

"Which they expect you to carry to me, hoping to frighten me."

"Mebbe so."

"Get ready. We are going to the circus, and we'll have to hurry to get there in time to warn Mr. Jingling."

"Guess thet means ter strap on a extra gun?"

"Well, you might take along all the artillery you've got," laughed Ted.

When they reached the show-grounds, the King of the Wild West began to plan for an attack. Mr. Jingling called together all his tent and wagon men, and every man in the bunch, as he put it, would rather fight than eat.

"We are expecting some misguided people to try to break up this show to-night," said he to them. "You are to obey Mr. Strong, following whatever plans he may put before you."

Notwithstanding the rumors of trouble, there was a big crowd. The performance had just begun, and Ted was beginning to think that Bud had been misled, or Mancos Jim had backed down, when he heard a sound which most people would have mistaken for the yelping of a coyote: Then he heard others. Mancos Jim's men were coming to break up the show. Raising his hand, which was a signal for the band to strike up a lively tune, so as to drown out other noises, he and the boys hurried out of the big tent.

CHAPTER X.

THE MURDER OF BIG AZTEC.

It was very dark outside, but the coyote yelps indicated to the young rough riders from which direction trouble was approaching.

Waiting a moment to give Mancos Jim's men time to get close to the tent, the King of the Wild West gave three long yells, which was a signal to the circus men he had stationed around the show to begin operations. Among them were some men very proficient in imitating the cries of wild animals.

At the signal from Ted these men rushed toward Mancos Jim's ruffians, shouting: "Run for your lives, there's a tiger loose."

Then those who could imitate the cries of wild animals got busy, and with the rush of men in the dark, the yelling, and the screams of wild animals. Mancos Jim and his men got rattled and thought Jingling's entire menagerie had broken loose.

They turned and fled, and Ted and the circus men kept right after them. When a gambler or a cowboy, as the case might be, would be overtaken, the animal imitators would set up a horrible racket and keep it up until the man, half frightened to death, was given a knock-out blow.

It was a big stampede, but it was soon over, and Mancos Jim, who was going to drive Jingling's circus into the Gulf of Mexico, never stopped running until he reached the White Elephant, and then he was so frightened and exhausted that he could not talk. He staggered and fell to the floor in a heap, and was carried up-stairs to his room.

The show was not bothered any more that night, and the band had made such a racket that the audience never knew that there had been trouble outside until, at the close of the performance, Mr. Jingling made a little speech in which he told just what had taken place. The crowd cheered Ted, and the next morning everybody knew the story and was laughing at Mancos Jim.

As Jim was ashamed to appear on the street, Big Aztec circulated around, telling the story because he saw a chance to win some votes.

Ted, while trying to protect Jingling, who had helped him in a crisis, had injured one of his opponents and benefited the other, thereby lessening his own chances of election.

The next day was Saturday, and the Baptist Sunday school was scheduled to give a picnic in the little grove a mile west of Gonzales. Stella wanted to go, but fortunately for her, as it developed later, Mrs. Graham was ill and she had to remain at the ranch.

Mr. Gordon, the minister; Mr. Cash, Mr. Scott, and Mr. West drove their families out to the grounds, and then came back to Gonzales to have a talk with the King of the Wild West. They told their wives that they would come back, or send somebody, to get them in the afternoon.

They brought news of a remarkable change in the political situation, a change which threatened to defeat Ted for marshal of Gonzales.

"They're importing voters, and we'll be beaten," cried Mr. Gordon, the minister.

"Who is?" asked Ted, staring at the excited men.

"Big Aztec and Mancos Jim."

"What are we to do?" demanded Mr. Cash. "Next Tuesday is election day, and we have little time for action."

"Big Aztec started it," broke in the minister. "He brought four men here from Gallup. Pretended to put them to work in his gambling-house. Then Mancos Jim sent to Wingate and got five men whom he has installed as cooks and porters in the White Elephant."

"Then Big Aztec brought two more," pursued Mr. Cash. "That inspired Mancos Jim to send for three. There is the situation, with Jim one in the lead and the next move Big Aztec's."

"If that sort of thing keeps us," said Mr. West, "the White Elephant will soon be overrun by porters and cooks, and there'll not be room in the Last Chance gambling-house for a man to turn round."

"But what are we to do?" demanded the minister.

"What did the last canvass of the town show?" asked Ted.

"That you'd have about five majority on an honest count," replied Mr. Cash. "But that's been changed since Big Aztec and Mancos Jim brought their voters here."

"It looks bad, I must admit," said the King of the Wild West, "but we must keep up our courage. Jim and Big Aztec may fall out at the last moment and challenge one another's imported voters."

"This is indeed disappointing," said the minister. "I had hoped that we would be able to elect you and clean up the town, but it looks like we were in for another term of lawlessness. If the officials of the town where Big Aztec and Mancos Jim are wanted for crimes they have committed would only drop in here now, the situation would be solved."

"There's no telling," encouraged Ted. "That might happen yet. You are mistaken if you think, from what I've said, that I've lost courage. I believe I'm going to win. Bad men can't always rule this town. They're bound to cut their own throats sooner or later."

"I wish I could feel as confident of success as you do," said the minister, with a doubtful shake of his head.

"It is nearly four o'clock," cried Mr. Cash, looking at his watch. "Goodness, we must be getting back to the grove for our families."

"Yes, yes," assented the minister, rising and getting his hat.

At that moment they heard a noise outside in the hall and Mr. Graham, who had been detained at home by the illness of his wife, stepped into the room, leading George Gordon and John Cash, sons, respectively, of the minister and the outfitter.

"Picked your boys up as I came along," said he, after greeting the men in the room.

"George," said the minister, "how did you get to town?"

"John and I walked in," the lad replied.

"I thought you was going to remain out there until we returned for you."

"But the folks left, and so did we, mama giving me permission to walk in with John."

"Why, where did the folks go? They were supposed to remain there until we came for them."

"Somebody got them!" exclaimed Mr. Cash. "John, tell us about it," commanded he, turning to his son.

"Well, didn't you say that you were going to send somebody for us if you didn't come back?" the lad asked.

"Yes, we did, but who came?"

"I don't know. There were a lot of men with wagons, and I didn't know any of them."

"How did those men manage to get the folks into the wagons?"

"Said you sent them out."

"That I sent them out?"

"Yes. You, and the minister, and Mr. Scott, and Mr. West."

"Did my folks get into those wagons?" asked Mr. Scott.

"Yes, sir."

"And my wife and daughter, too?" inquired Mr. West.

"Yes, sir."

"Which way did they drive?" the minister asked his son.

"Don't know," replied the lad. "John and I started away before the wagons left."

"And you followed the big road all the way back to town?"

"Yes, sir."

"And they didn't pass you coming in?"

"No, sir."

"Did you walk fast, or slow?"

"Just fooled along."

The men stared at each other. They seemed afraid to ask the question. Finally Mr. Cash turned to the minister and said:

"Something is wrong."

"They've been kidnaped," replied Mr. Gordon.

"But that don't look possible," protested Mr. Cash. "Kidnap a whole Sunday-school! Why, I never counted them, but there must have been at least twenty-five women, girls, and children."

"But they're gone, and they were taken away by men who said we sent them out, and you know that we didn't do that."

"That being the case," said Mr. West, "we ought to get away from here as quick as possible."

"Could we leave our sons here with you, Mr. Strong," asked the minister, "until we drive out and get at the facts in this mysterious affair?"

"Why, sure," replied the King of the Wild West. "Let me hear at once what you learn, so that if the worst has happened, I can send out the boys to assist you in the search."

They went out and drove rapidly away, and then Mr. Graham turned to Ted and asked:

"What do you think?"

"The Sunday-school has been kidnaped."

"Scott, Cash, and West do not seem to realize what has happened."

"When they find that their families are gone, they'll be in a mood for revenge in some extreme form."

"Of course Mancos Jim has had his men carry off the women and children in order to get even for the way we broke up his parade and frightened him at the circus last night."

"There is another and stronger motive," said Ted.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Graham eagerly.

"Mr. Cash will be a judge and Mr. Gordon a clerk of election next Tuesday. The object of Big Aztec and Mancos Jim is to keep our people engaged following their wives until after the election. That will enable them to put in a new judge and clerk and run things just to suit themselves."

"Ted," said Mr. Graham, rising, "I am going out of town for a few days. Please send Bud out to the ranch and tell Mrs. Graham."

"May I inquire what urgent business takes you away at this disturbed period of our political campaign?"

"I will tell you when I return Tuesday morning. I'll say, though, that my absence will be in the interest of you for marshal."

Mr. Graham hurried away, and presently Mr. West returned from the picnic-grounds. He staggered as he entered the room, and his face was white and drawn.

"What's the matter?" cried the King of the Wild West, springing to his side.

"They're gone, and we can't find any trace. Earth seems to've swallowed them. It's an outrage that I'm not going to stand."

"Rest assured that the kidnapers dare not harm them. An effort is being made to lead you away so that you will not be present on the day of election."

"Yes, I understand, and I'm going to Big Aztec right now and force him to release the folks immediately."

Ted looked at him and saw that it was useless to offer any objections. Mr. West was a strong-minded man who had the reputation of being a stranger to fear, who seldom had much to say, and whose promise was considered to be as good as his bond, and his financial standing in Gonzales was first-class.

The King of the Wild West watched him go out and close the door, and then he turned and gazed out of the window.

The sun was setting, and he had not been standing there many minutes before he saw Big Aztec come hurriedly out of the Last Chance and start across the street to the White Elephant.

When near the center of the street a pistol-shot rang out and he staggered and pitched forward on his face and lay still.

Ted scanned the street eagerly, expecting to see a puff of smoke, locating the man who had fired the shot.

But he saw none. Who had killed Big Aztec, making Ted's defeat for marshal certain?

In front of the hotel he caught sight of Mr. West calmly climbing into his buggy. Had he done it in a fit of rage?

Or was it Mr. Graham, who had only an hour ago announced that he was going out of town? Or was it Mancos Jim, whose election was assured by the tragedy?

One of the three men, Ted decided as he raced out to investigate, had fired the fatal shot.

CHAPTER XI.

TED STRONG WINS FRIENDS.

Mr. West was in the act of driving away when the King of the Wild West reached the sidewalk and grabbed the lines, saying, "Just a moment, please."

"I didn't do it, if that's what you want to know," replied the grocer. "I was unhitching my horse when it happened."

"Then who fired the shot?"

"I do not know. Probably Mancos Jim, or some man he hired for that purpose."

"Did you have a talk with Big Aztec?"

"Yes, and he had the impudence to say that he did not know where the Sunday-school class had been taken. I told him that he was a liar, and that if my wife and daughter were not at home by nine o'clock to-night that I would come down and kill him."

"My goodness!" cried Ted, "that makes it look bad for you. Did anybody overhear your threat?"

"The Last Chance held its usual crowd."

"Somebody, holding a grudge against Big Aztec, then stepped out and shot him from ambush, believing that you would be charged with the crime, and I guess that's coming to be the case, for yonder comes a crowd. You'd better cut and run and meet your accusers when the excitement has died down."

"Run!" exclaimed Mr. West. "Run from that bunch? Not much. I haven't done anything that would make me want to run."

He slipped out of the buggy and tied his horse again.

Down the street came a yelling mob, which was led by Mancos Jim and Lon Hyde, manager of the Last Chance gambling-house.

Hyde held a rope in his hand which he flourished as he urged the mob forward.

The King of the Wild West and the grocer backed up to the Metropole and waited in silence.

When the mob was only a few feet away, Bud Morgan came round the corner on the run.

"What's ther matter?" he cried, rushing up to the King of the Wild West.

"Big Aztec's been shot, and they're coming to lynch Mr. West, but he didn't do it."

Drawing their revolvers, Ted and Bud stepped in front of the grocer.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Ted sternly.

"Mr. West shot Big Aztec," yelled Hyde.

"Who saw him do it?"

"Why, why," stammered Hyde, "everybody."

"Trot out your witnesses."

Hyde looked the crowd over, as though searching for somebody, and then he wheeled on Ted and sneered: "Ah, we don't have to. Get out of the way."

"There'll be no lynching unless you produce reputable witnesses to prove that Mr. West fired the shot that killed Big Aztec, and I know you can't do that."

"Who says we have to do that?" sneered Mancos Jim, speaking for the first time.

"I do."

He stepped back, raised the brim of his sombrero, and, after staring doubtfully for a few seconds, added scornfully: "You say so. Ah, now I recollect," and he smiled. "You're the chap the women of Gonzales nominated for marshal."

"And you, I believe," retorted Ted, "are the man who got scared at an elephant and who was chased by a tiger at the circus last night."

"Keep your mouth shut, or we'll hang you," threatened Mancos Jim.

"You'll die first," yelled Ted, and Mancos Jim backed away into the crowd.

Hyde, having tied a noose in one end of the rope, endeavored to throw it over Mr. West's head, but Ted caught the rope at the critical moment and jerked it away from the gambler.

"Men," shouted the King of the Wild West at the mob, "if you want to hang the man who killed Big Aztec, hang Hyde."

"Who—me?" said the gambler, facing his friends, as though he expected some of them to spring upon his back.

"Yes, you," replied Ted.

"I never done it," said the gambler brokenly. "Don't believe a word he says, men."

"Listen," continued Ted. "A few days ago Hyde came to me with a proposition to support me for marshal, have you men to vote for me, if I would promise to let him keep a gambling-house in Gonzales."

"That's like Hyde," yelled a man in the crowd.

"That's a lie," screamed the gambler. "Don't listen to that locoed yearling. Come on, let's hang West. He done it."

"But that's not all," continued Ted. "He offered to make way with Big Aztec or Mancos Jim."

"That's another lie," shouted Hyde.

"When Mr. West," pursued Ted, "ascertained that his family had been carried off, he went to Big Aztec and told him that if his wife and daughter were not returned home by nine o'clock to-night, he would kill him. Hyde was standing by and heard the threat. He stepped out on the sidewalk, and when Big Aztec crossed the street to see Mancos Jim, who engineered the kidnaping, he shot him."

"That's the biggest lie of them all," stormed Hyde.

"You're off there a little, Mr. Strong," cried a man back in the crowd.

"Now, you see, don't you?" said Hyde, facing Ted suddenly. "There's a man who calls you a liar."

"Keep your shirt on, Lonnie," retorted the man in the rear of the mob, "and give me a chance to explain. You were up-stairs when you fired the shot which killed a better man than yourself."

A great silence fell upon the crowd, and all eyes were turned on the gambler, who was trembling as though he had the palsy.

"You, pup," he sputtered. "Step out where I can see you."

"I saw you, too," said another man.

"The same here," cried another.

"Let's lynch Hyde," yelled the mob, pressing toward him.

"Any man who lays a hand on Lon Hyde," said Mancos Jim, stepping in front of the now cowed and frightened gambler, "can expect to have a knife stuck in him."

"Like you stuck a knife in the man up in Colorado," retorted half a dozen men, "in the back when he wasn't looking."

"Aren't you going to arrest Hyde?" asked the King of the Wild West.

"No, I ain't going to arrest Hyde," sneered Mancos Jim, "and what's more, Lon's going to open as many gambling-houses as he wants to in Gonzales after I'm reelected."

"But you are not going to be elected," yelled the crowd. "Hurrah for Ted Strong."

"What's the matter with the King of the Wild West for marshal of Gonzales?"

"Why, he's all right."

"Come on and let's show him the town."

They surrounded Ted, and in the excitement Mancos Jim slipped away with Hyde.

The King of the Wild West was lifted to the shoulders of a big man, and then began a wonderful parade, the like of which Ted or the boys had never dreamed of.

As they marched back and forth through Gonzales, singing and shouting themselves hoarse, the procession increased in size.

A band was collected, and it led the mob, playing "The Conquering Hero," but no elephants came trumpeting to meet them.

Mancos Jim's partisans at first tried to stem the tide of sentiment setting in in the direction of the King of the Wild West, but their efforts were unavailing.

Mancos Jim and Hyde hid in the White Elephant boarding-house, and Ted had more than one struggle during the evening to prevent his new friends from invading the place and dragging the frightened men out and hanging them.

The parade wound up with a big demonstration at the Last Chance gambling-house, where Ted found Bud and Mr. West waiting for an opportunity to have a talk with him.

"I didn't leave town to join in the search for the Sunday-school when I saw the change in the situation," said the grocer, "because I thought you might learn where the

women and children were taken. Surely some of these men must know."

"I'll ask," replied Ted, and he did.

Mancos Jim had planned the kidnaping, Big Aztec refusing to lend a hand when asked to, because he was too much of a gentleman to frighten women and children.

But Big Aztec's friends had learned that the Sunday-school had been taken to Henderson's ranch up in the Zuni Mountains.

"Do you know where Henderson's place is?" asked Ted of the grocer.

"I should say so," replied Mr. West, smiling for the first time since he had heard of the kidnaping. "He used to be one of my warm friends, and I suppose he is yet, though I haven't seen him for a long time."

"Then we have no cause to be alarmed about the safety of the Baptist Sunday-school," said Ted. "When do you want to start for the ranch?"

"It's too late now, being almost midnight. It's a long ways, and I don't suppose the kidnapers have more than reached Henderson's by now. It will take two days to make the trip, so I guess I'd better start in the morning and come back Monday."

"Very well. Bud—yes, for goodness' sakes, Bud, jump on your pony and lope out to Los Gatos and tell Mrs. Graham that Mr. Graham has been called out of town on business and will not be back until Tuesday morning. He told me to send a message out right after he had departed, and I never thought of it again until this minute. Explain to Stella and Mrs. Graham the sudden change in the situation, and bring the boys back with you. Mancos Jim will be too busy from now on to go bothering women. The end of his career in Gonzales is rapidly drawing to a close."

"Where did Graham go?" asked Mr. West.

"He wouldn't tell me."

"That's strange."

"It is, and for awhile after Big Aztec was killed I thought he had slipped away to do that, as he was very much enraged over the kidnaping of the Sunday-school."

"Well," said the grocer, turning to the door, "I'll go home and get a few hours' sleep, and I'll call at the hotel early for the boys who are to go with me. I'd like to have you accompany us, but, then, you'll have to remain here and watch Mancos Jim and hold your new friends in line."

After Bud and Mr. West had departed, Ted returned to the Metropole. He was very much elated over the sudden change in the situation. His election was now assured.

When Ted reached his room, he remembered that Mr. Cash and Mr. Gordon had left their sons in his charge. He searched the four rooms which had been engaged as headquarters for himself, calling now and then and receiving no reply.

Then, very much alarmed, he went to the office and inquired of the clerk whether he had seen the boys. Yes, he had, but a man he did not know had come and taken them away several hours previously.

While Ted and his new friends were parading through the streets of Gonzales, Mancos Jim, the King of the Wild West felt certain, had sent a man to kidnap the children.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Ted rushed out of the hotel and hurried first to the home of Mr. Gordon, the minister, and then to that of Mr. Cash. Both houses were locked and dark. The boys were not there.

As he passed the White Elephant on his way to the Last Chance for men to assist in the search for the boys, he happened to notice a lad with his face pressed against the panes of a third-story window. The light from the street was so faint that he could not tell for sure who the lad was, but he felt that he saw the minister's son, George Gordon. While Ted stood looking up the boy's face was suddenly withdrawn, as though some one had hastily pulled him away.

In an instant Ted had made up his mind what he was going to do. He ran into the Last Chance and explained the situation in a few short, sharp sentences.

Men sprang from the gambling tables and followed him across the street, shouting and cursing.

They reached the third floor before Mancos Jim could call in assistance, and he fled through a rear door.

One of the boys was found in the room at the window of which Ted had seen his face for a moment.

John Cash was found in another room, after a number of doors had been broken down.

Mancos Jim did not gather a crowd and besiege the hotel, as he had done on a previous occasion. His friends had been handled too severely during the parade early in the evening, and they would not rally in his defense again.

The King of the Wild West felt greatly relieved when he returned to the Metropole and found that the young rough riders had gotten back. Now he would have somebody to guard the lads when he had to go out and watch Mancos Jim.

Sunday they buried Big Aztec, and late that night Mr. Gordon, Mr. Cash, and Mr. Scott returned to Gonzales and sought Ted.

They were discouraged, having lost the trail of the kidnapers in the Zuni Mountains.

Ted let them tell of their misfortunes before he recounted what had taken place in Gonzales since their departure.

"It seems too good to be true," said the minister, dancing around like a boy.

"That's not the way you acted the other day," laughed Ted.

"No," replied he sheepishly, "but when was it, did you say, that Mr. West was going to get back with the Sunday-school?"

"He calculated that he would reach home by Monday night."

"But won't he have a good deal of trouble recovering the women from Mancos Jim's guards?"

"I shouldn't think so. I sent Ben, Kit, Clay, and the men Big Aztec imported for voting purposes, to assist him. They'll not be likely to have any trouble."

But to the King of the Wild West and his friends it was soon evident that the expedition had met with misfortune of some kind, for Monday passed without it returning, and that was an anxious night for all. There was no sleep for Ted that night.

After midnight it became evident that Mr. West and the boys would not get back in time to be of any assistance during the election when they would be sorely needed.

During the day he had been informed by spies that Mancos Jim had bragged that he was going to be elected if he had to steal the ballot-box to accomplish his purpose. He had passed the word around that Ted must be kept out.

The proprietor of the White Elephant had even tried to bribe some of Ted's new friends, and, failing in that, he had endeavored to bulldoze them into voting for him.

Feeling was at fever-heat, and there had been many fights in the street.

There was only one polling-place in Gonzales—a vacant storeroom in the center of the town, a block south of the White Elephant and the Last Chance.

Much to the surprise of Ted and his friends, Mancos Jim did not appear at the voting-booth when it was opened Tuesday morning, nor were any of his men there to create a disturbance.

By noon a majority of the votes had been polled, and while the contest was close, it was generally conceded that Ted was in the lead.

"I thought this wuz goin' ter be as interestin' as a dog-fight," said Bud, stopping Ted in front of the polling booth along in the middle of the afternoon. "Ther boys ain't missed much by stayin' 'way."

"If Mancos Jim is not a big coward, then I don't understand it," replied Ted. "But wait," he added, looking up the street. "Here come Jim's imported voters in a body."

The men, ten strong, entered the booth and offered to vote. Of course, the right was denied them, and without a word of protest they walked out and marched back to the White Elephant.

"Who'd you vote fer?" asked Bud, his eyes twinkling.

"And that reminds me," cried the King of the Wild West. "I haven't voted yet. I'll just go in and get that off my hands."

While Ted was inside Mancos Jim and his imported voters came running down the street.

Bud, who was on guard at the door, stepped in front of Jim, saying: "Wait a minute. There's a gentleman 'head o' you."

"Get out of my way," said Jim, shoving Bud to one side.

"Why can't my people vote?" he bellowed at the judges.

"They haven't lived here long enough," replied Mr. Cash. "Their home's in another town. Have you voted, Jim?"

"Yes."

"Then step outside, please. You have no business in here."

"As much business as that fellow," roared Jim, pointing his finger at the King of the Wild West. "What right has he in here?"

"He hasn't voted yet," said Mr. Cash.

"That's a lie. You think I don't know what you're up to. You're stuffing the ballot-box, to keep me out. That's what you are doing."

"Go on out, now," said Mr. Cash, "or you will make it necessary for us to call the guard and have you put out."

"I'd like to see you or any other man put me," he stormed.

"Bud, oh Bud!" called Mr. Cash.

But Bud did not answer. He had been shoved aside by the ruffians at the door, and he was at that moment returning from a store next door, whither he had gone to get a ladder to reach one of the rear windows of the building in which the judges were receiving ballots.

The King of the Wild West finished folding his ballot and handed it to Mr. Cash.

"I challenge that vote," cried Mancos Jim, springing forward.

Mr. Cash dropped the bit of paper in the ballot-box, and Mancos Jim grabbed the box. Mr. Cash held on and Ted leaped forward and gave Mancos Jim a shove which sent him spinning toward the door.

The enraged marshal drew a knife from between his shoulder-blades and make a lunge at Ted.

The judges of election shouted, "Look out, he's got a knife," and Ted, who had drawn his revolver, struck Jim's uplifted hand with a swift side blow, and the weapon clattered to the floor.

Putting one foot on the knife, he gave the marshal another shove, which sent him clear back to the door. As Jim brought up against the men gathered there to watch the fight and prevent others from getting in and stopping

it, one of the men handed him a revolver, and he wheeled about and fired.

Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, with blood spurting from a wound in the right temple, pitched forward and fell heavily to the floor.

At that moment there was a commotion at the door, the men were swept aside, and a girl leaped into the hall.

She was Stella Fosdick.

Running swiftly to Ted's side, she stooped, snatched up his big revolver, and, with her pearl-handled weapon in the other hand, she wheeled on Mancos Jim and cried shrilly, stamping the floor emphatically.

"Drop it! I am not much of a speech-maker, but I want to say that Ted Strong has been elected, and these revolvers are here to support him."

At that moment Bud Morgan threw open the rear window, covered Mancos Jim, and yelled, "Drop ther gun!"

Clinging to the ladder behind Bud were Ben, Clay, and Kit, wo had just returned with the kidnaped Sunday-school class.

Mancos Jim looked into the muzzles of Stella's revolvers and let his own weapon fall to the floor.

The boys poured into the room through the window and ran to Ted and lifted him from the floor, while Stella marched Mancos Jim to the door. At that moment Mr. Graham, accompanied by a big man, entered, and Mr. Graham said: "That's your man."

The stranger stepped up to Mancos Jim and said: "I am the sheriff of Ouray County, Colorado, and I have a warrant for your arrest, charging you with murder. I arrest you."

Handcuffs were slipped on Mancos Jim's wrists, and with his hat pulled down so as to hide his face, he was led out of the room by the sheriff.

Ted was not seriously hurt. The ball glanced off, and in a short time, after Mr. Graham, Mr. West, and the boys had voted, he was able to walk back to the Metropole.

The ballots, when counted, showed that the King of the Wild West had been elected marshal of Gonzales by a majority of twenty-five.

It was a great victory, which, as Ted freely admitted, was gained by the valuable assistance of Stella Fosdick.

* * * * * * *

The King of the Wild West's first official act was to arrest Lon Hyde for the murder of Big Aztec, who was convicted and hanged.

Mancos Jim was taken back to Colorado, but he was never tried for killing the man he stabbed in the back. A mob broke into the jail and lynched him.

In one month Ted Strong had closed every gambling-house and saloon in Gonzales. Then he appointed a clerk in Mr. Cash's outfitting-store as his deputy, and at a big public meeting in the opera-house, where everybody assembled to thank him for what he had done for law and order, he resigned, and the deputy served out his term of office.

THE END.

Ted Strong learns by means of a mysterious cryptogram while in Texas of a certain buried treasure on the banks of a bayou near the Gulf of Mexico on the Texas coast. He decides to go there and dig it up. Buried treasure is a fascinating thing for all boys, and the King of the Wild West was no exception when he had managed to decipher the message that told him the part of the country it was in. Stella Fosdick persuaded her uncle Mr. Graham, to join the exploration-party, and it was due to her presence that most of the adventure came about, although the story of the treasure itself is a most fascinating one. The loot which Ted found is historic, and has engaged hundreds of adventurers for a century or more. The title of the story is "King of the Wild West's Booty; or, Stella Finds the Pirate Loot." It is contained in No. 100 of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

About the Early Numbers of **Tip Top Weekly**

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

The Price of The Merriwell Books is Ten Cents per Copy. At all Newsdealers

Frank Merriwell at Yale.	Medal No. 205.	10c.
Frank Merriwell Down South.	Medal No. 189.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Camp.	Medal No. 258.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in England.	Medal No. 240.	10c.
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A CHAT WITH YOU.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The deluge of letters of praise pouring into our editorial rooms has impelled us to open this department, where, from week to week, we may meet our multitude of enthusiastic young readers and answer various questions concerning sports afield. If you desire to know anything connected with outdoor life, hunting, fishing, fur-collecting, or cowboy life on the plains, ask freely, since on our staff we have editors who are thoroughly posted in all that pertains to healthy sport in the open. In many cases we may have to abbreviate letters, but it shall be our aim to print everything that we believe must prove of interest to the great body of readers. We shall also, when not requested otherwise, give the address as an evidence of good faith.

As I am a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, I wish to say that it contains the best stories I have ever read
28 First Avenue, Kearney, Neb. JAMES MCMAHON.

How many readers, when they see this, will say the same!

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES are the best Western stories ever published. MINNIE ADAMS.
Hamilton, Mo.

It is not only boys who like to read about Ted Strong. This letter from a girl reader shows that girls find as much enjoyment in these fascinating stories of Western life as their brothers.

Before I ever heard of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, I read all kinds of novels, but since I heard of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, I got the earliest number possible, which was No. 2, and I have read every number since. I think the ROUGH RIDER stories are the best novels printed. WILLIE WHITE.
1416 Logan Avenue, Marinette, Wis.

Your experience is the same as that of hundreds of other readers.

I get the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY every week, and I think it is a fine paper. It's Western adventures are great.
Osceola Mills, Pa. ARTHUR ALLARD.

The stories are getting better every week.

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is about the best weekly published. I like them all. The Wild West just suits me, and I think your stories come pretty near to being it.
R. F. D. No. 1, Richmond, Ill. FORD W. HERRICK.

Every boy likes to read about the prairie and Ted Strong's adventures.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from the first number, and I am one of the boys that agree with you when you say that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY contains the best stories of Western adventure ever written. I thank Mr. Taylor for writing about the rough riders, for I have enjoyed reading about Ted Strong and his lively cowboys. If ever any one deserved his name, it is Ted, for he is the truest Western boy that ever straddled a bucking bronco. I have read sketches of the wild and woolly West, and I think the rough riders the best.
Emmett, Tenn. H. F. PETERS.

Ted Strong is always true to himself. His manliness and courage have made him the idol of every American boy.

I read all of your weeklies, but I like the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY the best. VANCE BOUNDS.
Bennettsville, S. C.

They are all good, but each of our libraries has a different kind of story. The reason why you prefer the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is that it contains stories of cowboy life on the Western plains, which the others do not.

I say that Ted Strong deserves having the title of being the King of the Wild West. I like Ted Strong because he handles the villains so easy and slick. The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best book that any boy or man can read, because it is the best [illegible]ished. I have been a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY a long time and expect to keep on reading it. Papa reads it every week when I get through with it. Papa says I shall not read any other story-paper. WILLIE M. TAYLOR.
Suffolk, Va.

We see that your last name is the same as that of the famous author who writes the renowned Ted Strong stories.

I have read all of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY stories except the first five numbers, and think that they all are very good stories. Anyway, I like to read them, and get them from my dealer every Friday. HARLEIGH S. PEACOCK
120 Gaines Avenue, Buffalo, N. Y.

Keep all the back numbers of your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. Later on you can get them bound for very little, and [illegible] have a handsome volume to put in your bookcase.

Your books are the best novels of the kind I have ever read. I have read them all from No. 1 to No. 66. There are a great many boys on our street that read them. Can I get copies at the same price the stores sell them? H. E. DODGE
376 Homer Street, Chicago, Ill.

Yes. Your news-dealer will furnish copies of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY at the regular price, five cents per copy.

I am glad to have the pleasure of recommending the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY to all readers. I think Ted Strong is the bravest fellow I ever read of. And the book contains the most interesting stories. I obtain the books, as they come in each week, from our news-dealer, but I would like to have all the back numbers. BEN ANGEL.
P. O. Box 165, Portageville, Mich.

We will furnish you all the back numbers of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY at the regular price of five cents a copy.

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best book I ever read. I've read all kinds of stories, but ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY beats them all. GEORGE URQUHART.
88 Berkelley Street, Toronto, Ontario.

There is life and action to the stories in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY which always holds one's attention.

I have read a great many of your Wild West stories, and don't think they can be beaten. I would like to shake hands with old Bud Morgan. VOLLIE BARNES.
Lone Oak, Tex.

Bud Morgan says that he wishes you could join the rough riders and become his pardner.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY ever since it has been published. I think it's the best story a-going
43 Bigelow Street, Brighton, Mass. ALBERT NELSON.

Our Massachusetts friend takes a great deal of interest in everything pertaining to life in the West.

I thought I would write and let you know what I think about the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. I think it is the best Wild West library published. Ted Strong and his companions do some wonderful things. REUBEN CRISWELL.
1027 Virginia Avenue, Canton, Ohio.

Ted is a wonderful boy, and so are his inseparable companions, the young rough riders.

I think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY has the most interesting Western stories I can get hold of. HENRY BORDEN
R. R. No. 32, Acton, Ind.

Your statement shows that you are a discriminating reader, and are able to appreciate the best stories of Western life published to-day.

I have been reading many numbers of King of the Wild

[illegible] I read them. I can hardly wait for the next week's issue. It is pleasant all the way through.
[illegible] MORRISETE.
[illegible] Utah.

No [illegible] in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for excitement and interest.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY [illegible] they were first published, and think them the best Western stories written.
Georgetown, Ky. LLOYD LEE.

They are unquestionably the best stories of Western life [illegible] to-day.

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is a very fine weekly. I am [illegible] and am much interested in the rough riders. I [illegible] of Buffalo Bill and his comrades. I think that [illegible] in the world as good as the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. LEWIS MORGAN HANSEN.
[illegible] Michigan Avenue, Evanston, Ill.

Perhaps Buffalo Bill postal cards will be issued later on. Don't you think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY cards are fine?

Among the many different books I have read I have found your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best. It contains the most exciting and interesting tales of Western adventure I have ever read about. FRANK DEARING.
R. F. D., Route 4, Waverly, Ohio.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY always contains a lively story. If a person wants to read something that will hold his attention from the first chapter to the last he should get a copy of this famous library. There is nothing in its field that can compare with it

---

I have been reading your book, the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, for nearly two months, and I think they are the best there are.
15 Pomeroy Street, Cortland, N. Y. LYNN SHOALS.

You will get to like the stories so much that you will always be a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I have been a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for a good while, and I think it the best weekly published.
Box 88, Union, S. C. GREENE SANDERS.

May you always be a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I think the young rough rider is honest and true as he can be, and can ride a horse as good as any one else.
The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY stories are better than any stories published. EDDIE BECKER.
Higginsville, Mo.

Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, is the most popular young man in the great West to-day.

Having read some of your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES, I lent them to some other boys in town, and they told me to try and get some more. JOHN HARTLEIB.
Dashwood, Ontario, Canada.

We do not doubt that your boy friends thoroughly enjoyed the stories in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best weekly ever published.
427A Sixth Street, Calumet, Mich. ALPHONSE PICHE.

Everybody else thinks so, too.

My opinion of your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is that it is the best book out. It gives a better description of Western life and adventure than any other library. There is more good reading in the same space in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY than in any other. EDISON KUHN.
R. F. D., Route 3, Box 2, Waverly, Ohio.

Publishers of cheap imitations have tried to interest readers in stories of Western life, but failed, as the stories were not as good as those written by the Ted Strong [illegible] take to sticking to the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. The [illegible] in the library are the [illegible] picture of life on the great Western plains.

I think that your stories are the best published.
Parkesburg, Pa. ALBERT YOST.

Write to us [illegible] the next time. We will be glad to hear from you.

I like Ted Strong best and Bud Morgan next. I think the stories in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY are fine, and hope you keep on publishing them. MORRIS L. GARDNER.
Humboldt, Kan.

We shall keep publishing the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for a long time, and hope to reckon you among the choice band of old-time readers.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY ever since it was published, and I think it is the best book for boys ever issued.
121 Divenson Street, Lyons, Iowa. RALPH TIESSE.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is certainly the best boys' weekly treating of Western life published to-day.

I like to read your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, because I think it is the best five-cent book published. I think it worth five cents and more, but we boys can get them at that and will take them at that price. I'd rather read them than any of the others. Why? Because they are the best. I think all boys ought to praise the best, and I think they will praise the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. CLARENCE ALBEA.
Harmony, N. C.

A catalogue of the five-cent publications has been sent you in accordance with your request.

I have read a good many books in my time, but I will say with a clear conscience that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best I ever read, and a good many of my friends are of the same opinion. It has lots of humor. As long as you continue to print it you may count me as one of your readers.
R. F. D. No. 44, Prospect, Pa. GUY MURPHY.

Humor of a good wholesome kind is one of the qualities which has made the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY so popular. We all like to laugh when reading an interesting story, and Mr. Ned Taylor has taken this into account.

Well, I think the Ted Strong books are the best ever written. I have read a good many of his books and like them fine. I think I will keep on reading them. He is noted for such coolness and bravery. ESTI PARIS.
Harmony, N. C.

The coolness and bravery of Ted Strong and his rough riders have made him the greatest hero of to-day.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best I ever read.
Lone Oak, Tex. THOS. S. BARNES.

You are a great admirer of Ted Strong and have good cause to be.

I have read your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from Genesis to Revelations and like them well. E. O. SPARKS.
Lone Oak, Tex.

Few words, but they express a great deal.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from No. 20 and some day I will send and get the back numbers. I think they are the best that I have ever read. The characters I like best are Ted Strong, Bud Morgan, and Kit Summers.
1630 Packard Avenue, Racine, Wis. [illegible]

The persons you men[illegible] [illegible] where.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

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